# JESUS: SEVEN QUESTIONS

J. WARSCHAUER

# Central BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

# JESUS: SEVEN QUESTIONS

# JESUS: SEVEN QUESTIONS

## CHAPTERS IN RECONSTRUCTION

BY

J. WARSCHAUER, M.A., D.PHIL.

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW EVANGEL"

"CHRISTIANITY STANDS OR FALLS, LIVES OR DIES, WITH THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS CHRIST; . . . ITS INNERMOST DOCTRINE IS INCARNATE IN THE PERSON OF ITS FOUNDER."

F. CRAWFORD BURKITT, M.A., D.D.

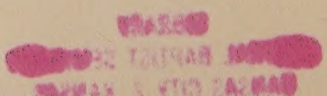
THE PILGRIM PRESS

BOSTON CHICAGO

LIBRARY
CENTRAL BAPTIST SEMINARY
KANSAS CITY 2, KANSAS

Copyright, 1928, in the United States of America
SIDNEY A. WESTON

THE JORDAN & MORE PRESS
BOSTON



232
W295

# PREFACE

IN the course of a late theological discussion one of the protagonists on the more popular side delivered himself of an *obiter dictum*, in which he referred to his opponents generally as "learners." To the present writer such an appellation, with what intention soever bestowed, appears so entirely honourable that he is most eager to lay claim to it. No one has less excuse than a theologian in refusing to learn; no one more than he should seek to live up to Solon's motto, "I advance in years, being ever taught many things."

The following pages, then, are offered frankly as a learner's essays upon some great questions which have occupied Christian thought for century after century; they are put forward, that is to say, with no pretensions to either originality or finality, but simply as an honest attempt at re-examination and reconstruction, in the hope that such an untechnical treatment of the subjects covered may be of help to some who find themselves compelled to face the problems of Christology anew. The author makes ready acknowledgment of his indebtedness to theologians of many types; indeed, he owes by no means least to some from whose general standpoint and conclusions he has no choice but to differ.



38294

# Preface

Writing his chapters at a particular juncture in the development of theological thought in England, he has felt justified in making numerous references to books and articles which have been called forth by the present situation, and published within the last twelve months. At the same time he trusts that, while all the questions treated in the compass of this volume form the subjects of controversy, he may have succeeded, even when expressing dissent from the views of others, in steering clear of that asperity from which theological writings unfortunately are not always free. Sometimes it has seemed to him simpler, as well as more in the interests of Christian amity, to criticise an author's opinion without referring to him by name.

The fact that the greater part of the introductory chapter is given over to an inquiry into the historicity of the Fourth Gospel may seem to call for a word of explanation. The author can only plead his conviction that the extraordinary amount of confusion in which the subject of Christology is enveloped to-day must be largely set down to the prevailing misconception of the character of this Gospel, which from beginning to end proclaims itself to be not a history but a spiritual interpretation of the Person of our Lord. In no other respect has average theological opinion in this country shown itself less disposed to come to terms with facts than in its treatment of the Johannine problem. In this connection one specially welcomes the appearance of such

recent works by British scholars as Professor Burkitt's *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, and Mr. E. F. Scott's *The Fourth Gospel*, in both of which the modern conclusions as to this Gospel's historical value are adopted ; some time, however, will elapse before those conclusions are popularised, and to this extremely desirable consummation the author has sought to make a slight contribution. That the true value of the Fourth Gospel—*i.e.*, its spiritual and interpretative value—does not suffer from the surrender of its strictly historical character, he hopes to have shown in the closing pages of his introduction.

Another of the questions dealt with in this book has quite recently received illuminating treatment at the hands of yet another British theologian, Professor Kirsopp Lake, in his volume on *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.* To this masterly survey, marked throughout by the judicial temper, by untiring patience, and by exceptional skill in the handling and weighing of proof, the present writer is under peculiarly heavy obligations, which he is the more desirous of acknowledging since Professor Lake's arguments have led him to modify some of his own positions.

It is with a certain diffidence that he finally offers a prefatory remark or two on the great question of the Atonement, or rather, on some of the contributions recently made in this country to the discussion of that

subject. With every wish to discover points of agreement rather than of difference, it is impossible for him to escape the conclusion that the writers in question are still under the sway of theories of punishment, of expiation and of forgiveness which the ethical consciousness of the age is fast leaving behind. Sin is still construed by them quite in the old legalistic manner, as a debt "due to God"—"a plain and definite debt to the moral law, which may be as righteously discharged for us by another as a debt to civil law may be, granted a friend loving us sufficiently to pay it." That sin has something to do with the sinner's *character*, which cannot be cleansed by such an external method of vicarious payment, seems to be overlooked in such a view. Again, we are told that the propitiation for man's transgression "could only have been made by the sinless Son voluntarily taking upon Himself the condemnation of human sin;" but how any being, sinless or otherwise, could suffer *condemnation—i.e.*, moral censure—in respect of sins he had not committed, or how sin itself could be condemned in a Sinless One, is left unexplained. "We are stating a fact of reason and experience," we read, "when we say that only through the Cross can men be forgiven;" and the method of proving this alleged fact when, say, a devout Jew appeals to *his* experience of Divine forgiveness, is apparently to tell him that his experience is illusory and "purely subjective"!

All such theorisings recall Harnack's criticism of Anselm's theory of the Atonement, which he described

as moving in a region too abstract and unreal, and compared to "the speculations of a clever child upon the subject;" or perhaps we might apply Dr. Horton's comment on Dr. Dale's theory, of which he said that "it starts from presuppositions which seem arbitrary, and requires us to put ourselves in a certain mental attitude of concession before it carries any conviction to the understanding." Worst of all, it is not only our understanding but our moral sense which these dialectics fail to satisfy.

To anyone who may feel tempted to make the acceptance of a particular view of the significance of the Cross an ecclesiastical test, one might venture to commend a passage occurring in the same essay from which the foregoing quotation was taken: "It was the sagacious opinion of Gregory of Nazianzus that speculations about the death of Christ should be ranked with questions concerning the creation of the world, the nature and matter of the soul, the resurrection, the judgment —questions on which correct ideas may be useful, but mistaken ideas are not dangerous. It would, indeed, be a great, though unexpected, result of all the theorising on the subject from Irenæus to Dr. Dale, if we were led back to this verdict of Gregory's."[1] We agree, adding that it would also be a very welcome result, though, fifteen years having elapsed since this utterance was penned, Dr. Dale's would not be the last name on our list of speculative theologians.

[1] Horton, "The Atonement," in *Faith and Criticism*, p. 198.

# Preface

That these "chapters in reconstruction" may serve the purpose with which they are sent forth, *viz.*, to show that when modern criticism and modern thought have obtained a full hearing, the essential verities of our faith —the Divinity of our Lord, the Incarnation of God in Him, and the Atonement of God and man through Him—remain not only unshaken, but more firmly established than ever, is the author's sincere and earnest prayer.

# CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION: OUR SOURCES . . . . . 13

## JESUS: SEVEN QUESTIONS

CHAPTER

I. SON OF MAN OR SON OF GOD? . . . . . 61

II. WAS HE SINLESS? . . . . . 108

III. DID HE WORK MIRACLES? . . . . . 142

IV. HAD HE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS? . . . . 180

V. IS BELIEF IN HIM NECESSARY TO SALVATION? . 206

VI. DID HE RISE FROM THE DEAD? . . . . . 234

VII. DID HE DIE FOR US? . . . . . 268

# JESUS: SEVEN QUESTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

### OUR SOURCES

"*Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" That this categorical statement should have been made within, at most, a generation of the death of Jesus, constitutes a fact which must needs challenge attention. The view here expressed by the apostle embodies in effect what has been the undeviating persuasion of Christendom as a whole; the note he strikes is that which rings unmistakably through all the Christian centuries. When we say that Christianity is the religion of Christ, we mean that it is the religion which centres in His Person; the Founder is Himself the Foundation; He is not merely the exponent of a faith, but its Object. So much is simply a matter of history—that from the very earliest times Jesus Christ has inspired an unparalleled personal devotion; that from the days of the first apostles men have felt that it was He Himself that mattered supremely, that He Himself was the sum and substance of the revelation

which He brought. There has been little, if any, dispute amongst His followers concerning His precepts; but His Person has engaged the attention of the Christian Church without intermission, and the query which the disciples are reported to have asked of each other in an access of awe—"*Who then is this?*"—has continued the question of paramount importance to Christians from that day to this.

This, indeed, is the one theme of which apparently the world is quite unable to tire. In the early centuries council after council of the Church was held—and we do not forget the sad accompaniments of plotting and violence which disfigured so many of their deliberations—with the object of debating and determining this supreme issue. "At Nicæa, in 325 A.D., it was decided that Christ was truly God; at Constantinople, in 381, that He was perfectly man: at Ephesus, in 431, that He was undividedly One; at Chalcedon, in 451, that He was unconfusedly Two." In what manner and by what means some of these decisions were arrived at—by intimidation, bribery, intrigue, bloodshed—makes sufficiently unedifying reading, and a perusal of Gibbon's sub-acid pages should furnish a salutary corrective to any disposition to regard these assemblies with superstitious veneration; yet the one fact which this turbulent and often sordid chronicle attests is the unrivalled interest inspired by this one subject. And while ecclesiastics and schoolmen propounded this metaphysical theory and anathematised that one, there were at all

times unnumbered multitudes of simple, humble, Christian believers who, without being able or caring to follow subtleties of doctrine, yet knew and loved Christ, conscious that He was more to them than words could tell, their supreme authority, the unsurpassed ideal, the inexhaustible wellspring of spiritual life, their Lord and Saviour. There has never been a break in this attitude of human souls towards Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the outstanding fact with which we start and which we must seek to explain—that some nineteen centuries ago there passed across the stage of human history a Man who in the space of a year's, or at most three years', teaching in a remote corner of the earth produced such an impression that ever since His day men have not ceased to turn to Him, to worship Him, to find in Him the answer and fulfilment of all their religious needs. What is the cause adequate to explain such effects as these—what is it that has given to His Gospel its world-transforming power? "Who then is this," that exercises such an undiminished hold, after all these ages, upon the mind and heart of mankind, and who could be described, less than thirty years after His death on the Cross, as "the power of God and the wisdom of God"?

It is of course possible simply to dismiss this unique phenomenon with impatience; but to dismiss a problem is not to solve it. It is possible to treat this uniform preoccupation of Christians with the Person of their Master as a piece of mere perversity, and to echo the

historian's eighteenth-century sneer at those whom he describes as "more solicitous to explore the nature, than to practise the laws, of their Founder." Such criticisms, however, are singularly beside the mark. On the one hand, a disposition so uniformly characteristic of the Christian era would seem to spring from a deep-seated spiritual instinct rather than from a universal aberration[1]; and on the other, the very genius of Christianity consists in this, that it is not "a law of commandments contained in ordinances," but finds its access to the Father through a personal Mediator. When, therefore, a great modern scholar assures us that the ultimate and culminating faith of the future "will not insist that Christ shall be its centre any more than Plato," we can only, while quite unconvinced by this prognostication, point out that such a faith, though it might preserve the Christian ethics, would no longer be Christianity; for Christianity is that religion which has Christ Himself for its centre and dynamic, and apart from His personality would be as dead as the body apart from the spirit is dead. This latter statement, again, is not speculation, but borne out by experience, and ascertainable like other facts of experience and history.

If, then, what we have hitherto said is true, it will be at once admitted that there is to-day an urgent need for

[1] Cp. Goethe's—

"A good man, through obscurest aspiration,
Has still an instinct of the one true way."

such a re-examination of the main questions concerning the Person of Jesus Christ as that upon which we are setting out. Everyone with eyes to see is aware—indeed, by this time most people must be tired of being told—that ours is a more than ordinarily "transitional" age, an age of theological restlessness that is both widespread and acute, and bids fair to increase rather than to quiet down in the immediate future; it is an age when many doctrines which passed unquestioned for centuries are on their trial, when a new critical spirit is in the air, when new tests are being applied to old beliefs—a time of intellectual turmoil and spiritual insecurity that is felt in many quarters. For our part, we are not sceptical enough to be dismayed at the signs of heaven; the restlessness we see around strikes us rather as that of a belated spring, a promise of new life, and ere long we shall look to see much blossoming and vigorous fresh growth. Even at the present moment it seems to us already possible—indeed, needful—to present, with due modesty of bearing, something in the nature of a provisional re-formulation of belief in the light of modern knowledge and scholarship, and especially of beliefs bearing upon the central Figure of our faith. Was He the Son of God? Was He sinless? Did He perform miracles? Could He forgive sins? Must we believe in Him in order to be saved? Did He rise from the dead? Did He die for us?—all these are questions which are being keenly discussed on all sides to-day, and which, taken together, fairly cover the ground of Christology;

in attempting to answer each of them from the avowedly modern standpoint, we can only plead the earnest desire to aid the cause of a reverent and positive faith. Above all, while we shall not hesitate to show where and why we differ both from traditional views and modern arguments used in their defence, we shall bear in mind throughout how dear and sacred some of those views are to many who have grown up in them, and for whom they are associated with the holy of holies in their own experience.

## I

Before, however, we address ourselves to the first of our questions, there is a preliminary task to be taken in hand. We have to render ourselves some account of the sources of our knowledge regarding the Jesus of history; we have even, at the present juncture, to show sufficient reason for adhering to the belief that there was a historical Jesus, for there are to-day extremists who proclaim, with no lack of confidence, that "modern criticism decides that no confidence whatever can be placed in the reliability of the Gospels as historical narratives,"[1] if they do not even attempt, as Mr. J. M. Robertson, M.P., does, to consign Jesus to the realm of myth-making fancy. We may justly say that these are mere extravagances of opinion; nevertheless, since those who promulgate them have the ear of a certain section of the public, it may be well to reassure ourselves upon

[1] *The Transformation of Christianity*, by Charles T. Gorham; a "rationalist" tract.

this fundamental before going further. The reader may be reminded of that notable passage in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, where the hero, in discussion with an agnostic friend, tries to maintain that it really did not matter whether Christ actually existed or not—that what the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true, whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing His name.

"Pardon me," said Mardon, "but it does very much matter. It is all the matter whether we are dealing with a dream or with reality. I can dream about a man's dying on the Cross in homage to what he believed, but I would not perhaps die there myself; and when I suffer from hesitation whether I ought to sacrifice myself for the truth, it is of immense assistance to me to know that a greater sacrifice has been made before me, that a greater sacrifice is possible. To know that somebody has poetically imagined that it is possible, and has very likely been altogether incapable of its achievement, is no help."

What evidence have we, then, to establish this minimum, the existence of Jesus Christ as a historical character? Shall we find any references to Him in the non-Christian literature of the century following His death? Such references are to be found, but they are scantier than we might at first have expected. On reflection, however, this scantiness ceases to surprise—it even begins to impress us as indirect testimony to the genuineness of the few allusions which we are about to enumerate. We must bear in mind that while Palestine looms very large in our minds, it occupied a very small space in the Græco-Roman civilisation. Rome, with its sovereign

contempt for the Jews, barely troubled itself to record, far less to understand the meaning of, what it regarded as an abortive attempt at a rising, headed by a religious enthusiast, and suppressed at the very outset by the leader's execution. To us the trial and death of Jesus are of infinite significance; to Rome it was a trivial incident, hardly worth notice. Some eighty years after the crucifixion Pliny writes to the Emperor Trajan reporting the rapid spread of Christianity in Pontus and Bithynia; he gives a favourable enough description of the Christians as harmless, clean-living, though superstitious folk, and says that at their weekly gatherings they sing a hymn to Christ as to a God. At almost the same time Tacitus wrote his *Annals*, in the fifteenth Book of which he refers to the great conflagration at Rome in 64 A.D., and the cruelties to which the Christians were subjected because the guilt was fastened upon them by the imperial incendiary. What the historian has to say concerning their "mischievous superstition," matters little; the point of real importance consists in his statement that "the one from whom they had that name, a certain Christus, had been put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius"—"*auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat.*" It is true that this testimony is meagre, and that its authenticity has been challenged, though unsuccessfully; indeed, as we already hinted, its very slightness is indirect proof of genuineness, for a forger would hardly

have resisted the temptation of improving the occasion by giving far ampler details.

We have to enumerate yet one more extra-Biblical literary source of evidence for the historical existence of Jesus, *viz.*, a reference occurring in the *Antiquities* of the Jewish historian Josephus, who was born within a few years of our Lord's death. There is, indeed, one passage in this work descriptive of the crucifixion, but this is almost certainly a spurious insertion ; on the other hand, Josephus speaks of the death of James, to whom he alludes as "the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ." Now this passage is undisputed ; and the death of James took place when Josephus himself was a young man of about twenty-five, so that at that time James was generally known as the brother of Jesus, who in turn was known as the Christ. Slender as this hold may appear to be, it is quite strong enough for our immediate purpose ; for it suffices to show, coming from an unfriendly and therefore unassailable, quarter, that Jesus Christ was a historical figure, belonging to the first half of the first century of our era, and this is all we desire to establish for the moment.

When, however, we turn to the New Testament, we find ourselves at once face to face with a witness still earlier than Josephus, one who wrote a number of important letters between the years 50 and 60 A.D. ; one who claimed intimate acquaintance with the original apostles —intimate enough to withstand their chief to his face—

and whose one theme is Jesus Christ. Attempts have been made, it is true, to discredit the authenticity of every one of these documents, but these attempts have met with no support at the hands of such eminent and advanced critics as Harnack and Schmiedel, whose acceptance of the great Pauline epistles will be judged sufficient by most. In the course of these writings Paul does not tell his readers much concerning the life and teaching of Jesus, for he is in a position to assume their acquaintance with these elementary facts ; but his own teaching, his own apostolate—we may say, his own existence—are based throughout upon that unique Personality. Had there been no Jesus, there had never been a Paul, there had never been those marvellous letters to Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, throbbing with the very life-blood of one of the most strongly-marked individualities that ever left their mark upon the world.

What are the indisputable historical data guaranteed to us by the genuineness of the four principal epistles ? We learn from them that an actual personage of the name of Jesus had lived and taught within contemporary memory, and produced an indelible impression upon a circle of adherents who had gathered round Him. We learn that among the latter there were twelve intimate chosen disciples, the chief of whom are mentioned by name ; that He was acknowledged by His followers as the Messiah ; that He fell a victim to the hatred of the dominant orthodox and priestly factions of His day, into whose hands He was ultimately

delivered by treachery ; and that the early community of believers was firmly convinced that He had been raised from the dead, and been seen repeatedly after His resurrection, while His early return to earth was confidently expected. We learn, finally, that on the eve of His death He instituted the solemn rite of the Lord's Supper, to be observed as a permanent memorial ordinance. Above all, these letters are pervaded from first to last by a fervent devotion, an enthusiastic piety, a sense of all that Jesus meant to the apostle, who lived his own life simply in terms of Christ (Gal. ii. 20).

When at length we come to the four canonical narratives of His ministry and death, we shall at once be struck by the marked differences between the first three Gospels and the Fourth, differences of so far-reaching and so important a character that we shall have to treat of them separately and in some detail afterwards. But for the present let us note the main features of the first three Gospels, called " Synoptics " because of their common outlook and structure. With considerable divergences amongst each other, these three short memoirs present in the main a consistent account of the occurrences they relate, of the general course of events, above all, of the character of the principal and dominating Figure they depict. The three writers draw upon the same stock of narratives—or rather two of them, Matthew and Luke, are greatly indebted to the third, Mark, for the main scheme and much of the material of their

chronicles, so much so that the whole of Mark's Gospel, with the exception of some twenty-eight verses, may be found in Matthew and Luke. Not only is the priority of Mark established by this test, but again and again we find, in comparing an incident narrated by him with the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke, that the latter have either modified or amplified their source. Mark's simplicity, his directness, his entire candour, proclaim his to be the earliest Gospel, composed not later than 70 A.D. ; while, when we have separated from Matthew and Luke all they have derived from Mark, there remains a second principal source—now generally designated as "Q"—consisting in the main of sayings of Jesus, together with a few narratives. This document "Q," to which we are indebted for such invaluable material as the sermon on the Mount, is thought by Professor Harnack to have been composed in Aramaic, at a time preceding even Mark's Gospel, and to have been current in a Greek version as early as 60 A.D. ; and there can be no reasonable doubt that these two sources—Mark and "Q"—together with a third which is peculiar to Luke, contain an extensive and absolutely solid stratum of historical fact, giving us such a portraiture of Jesus as is self-evidently the result of close and exact recollection. "The astonishing thing," as has been well said, "is not that the Evangelists imported so much subjective colouring into their narratives, but that they imported so little. By repressing their own personalities, and by means of their objectivity, they have

greatly increased the trustworthiness of their records. The plainness of the discourses reported by them reveals a *style* which is classical in the highest sense of the term, and which in itself points back to a classical author of those discourses. They are themselves the proof of their genuineness ; they could not have been invented, but are revelations of the profoundest religious genius. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'—that language has been spoken only once" (Schrenck).

Nevertheless it may be urged that the Synoptic writers did not compose their treatises in the spirit of impartial historians, but rather as enthusiastic partisans, and with a distinct propagandist purpose, *viz.*, that of placing their Subject in the brightest possible light ; and that being so, how, it will be asked, can we be sure that the picture they draw does not owe its colours—perhaps even its contours—to their pious imaginations ? In part we have already answered that question in the quotation given above ; the matter, however, admits of yet another test. In a work written by a fervent disciple with the object of glorifying his Master, we might conceivably doubt any statement that seemed to aim solely at setting the latter upon a superhuman pedestal, regardless of historical or psychological probability ; and if the whole work gave to the reader that uniform impression, his doubts might appear *a priori* well founded. If, on the other hand, such a memoir were found to record incidents presenting the Master under very human aspects, we should say at once that these elements at

least were unmistakably genuine, and that for an obvious reason: incidents of this order would not have been *invented*, nor would they have been incorporated in the work at all but for the fact that they were well attested, and reposed on a trustworthy tradition.

This line of argument has been pursued by one of the most thorough-going of New Testament critics,[1] and claims a necessarily brief summary in this place. Schmiedel's method has been that of bringing together a number of Gospel passages which nobody would have "made up" concerning Jesus, but which, as a matter of fact, were felt from early times to constitute so many difficulties, so that they would not have been retained at all but for the fact that they were supported by weighty testimony to their genuineness. We have such a passage, *e.g.*, in Mark iii. 21, where we read that "His friends went out to lay hold on Him; for they said, He is beside Himself"—the "friends" in question being none other than His mother and brethren (cp. verses 31—35). So painfully out of keeping with later sentiment was this episode felt to be that, although Matthew and Luke, as we have seen, used Mark, they omitted this detail from their narratives. It is Mark again who tells us that when someone addressed Jesus upon one occasion as "Good Master," He immediately disclaimed the appellation by saying, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save one, even God" (Mark x. 18;

[1] Prof. Schmiedel, *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Gospels," also in preface to Arno Neumann's *Jesus*, and in *Jesus in Modern Criticism*.

cp. Luke xviii. 19). Matthew, however, found these words so unpalatable that in his Gospel they appear in the form, "Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good?"—a rejoinder which necessitated a corresponding recasting of the rich young ruler's question (Matt. xix. 16). Once more, there is the exclamation upon the Cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Could such a human cry have been invented as the utterance of One who was already receiving superhuman honours from His followers? Surely not; and the third and fourth Evangelists accordingly omit it as no longer in harmony with the feeling of their times. Yet again we have Mark's unvarnished statement concerning the Lord's activity in "His own country," that "He could do there no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them; and He marvelled because of their unbelief" (vi. 5, 6). This also soon became unacceptable, and appears in Matt. xiii. 58 in a form which conveys an entirely different impression, *viz.*, "And He did *not many* mighty works there *because* of their unbelief."[1] Here the earlier suggestion of inability has disappeared, and its place has been taken by the implication that if more miracles were not performed on that occasion, it was to punish the people for their lack of faith in the Lord.

Now the all-important point which these passages

[1] Cp. for an instance of the same tendency Matt. xii. 15, "And He healed them *all*," with Mark's more modest statement, "for He had healed *many*" (iii. 10).

establish is simply this, that no one would have imagined the incidents and sayings in question—the tendency, if any, was towards their elimination or modification; if we find them in the New Testament at all, it is because they are historical—because they form part of the career of One who actually lived, taught, and sealed life and teaching by His death on the Cross. But this is, of course, merely a starting-point which we have gained. If we can be sure beyond all doubt, from the examination of such Gospel passages as those referred to above, that Jesus belongs to the realm of history, we can also be sure of much else; we can be sure that we possess a credible record of the main outlines both of His ministry and of His teaching, as recorded in the first three Gospels. We are not at the present moment touching on the question of the miraculous element in the Gospels at all, reserving that subject for later treatment; but leaving this on one side, we ask: How much of the Jesus who reveals Himself to us in the Synoptics does the most rigorous criticism leave essentially untouched? Let the answer be given in Professor Schmiedel's own words: "All those [*viz.*, statements in the Gospels] which affirm something peculiarly great about Jesus, or put into His mouth some saying of marked significance, *must* be accepted as historical."[1]

[1] It is a little surprising that the bearing of Prof. Schmiedel's argument, which seems plain enough, should have met with so much misunderstanding, and that in quite opposite quarters. Thus Dr. Horton, in his volume *My Belief*, p. 128, says in obvious reference to Schmiedel's method that it gives "the impression

But such a criterion guarantees nothing less than the overwhelming bulk of the teaching we find in our

that no words of Jesus are sure except those which show His limitations;" the quotation we have given above of Schmiedel's *ipsissima verba* supplies a sufficient answer to this unfounded construction. On the other hand a "rationalist" writer, Mr. C. T. Gorham, in *The First Eastern Dawn*, makes the following statement on the same subject: "Evidence furnished by persons who do not understand the nature of evidence, is never reliable. Throughout, the Gospel testimony is of the latter character. Modern Biblical criticism finds that the most credible passages relating to Jesus are those in which the tendency to glorify Him is least conspicuous. As Prof. Schmiedel has pointed out, expressions which contradict this tendency are not likely to have been deliberately invented. It does not follow, as Mr. J. M. Robertson has rejoined, that they are, for that reason, true, or that, even if true, they guarantee that any other part of the tradition is true." Almost every sentence in this statement is open to the gravest exception. That the Gospel testimony "throughout" shows the Evangelists to have been unable to understand the nature of evidence, is only the author's unsupported assumption. That modern Biblical criticism finds a certain class of passages "the most credible" of those relating to Jesus, is simply inaccurate; for Schmiedel himself, after pointing to the passages in question, draws, as his words show, quite a different inference from that which Mr. Gorham attributes to "modern Biblical criticism" generally. As for Mr. J. M. Robertson's rejoinder, we may gauge that writer's sense of probability and the value of his historical judgments by the fact that he, *e.g.*, dismisses the episode of the cleansing of the Temple as mythical because Osiris is shown on Egyptian monuments armed with a flail; while he rejects the incident of the crown of thorns as unhistorical because he finds its "root-motive" in the nimbus of the Sun-god! We may be pardoned for expressing a doubt whether a writer who seriously propounds such wild guesses as these in order to discredit the historicity of Jesus Christ, can be said to "understand the nature of evidence."

first three Gospels as unmistakably genuine; for that teaching bears the sign-manual of one profoundly original individual mind, as little to be mistaken as it is to be imitated. Where in the whole of literature do we find anything comparable to the Beatitudes, or to the Sermon on the Mount which they introduce? Where outside the Synoptic Gospels do we meet with the kind of narrative we should place side by side with the parables of the Sower, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son? How surely do the crisp, pregnant aphorisms which stud these pages attest the unity of their origin—how unlike are they either to the prudential precepts of the Book of Proverbs, or to the didactic maxims of the rabbinical wisdom book, the *Pirké Aboth!*

And the teaching, once we have accepted its genuineness, tells us a great deal in turn concerning the Teacher: it is, indeed, pervaded by His personality from beginning to end, and this notwithstanding the fact that that personality is hardly ever insisted upon or made the theme of the teaching. For Jesus does not deal in mere abstract axioms or timeless generalities; while His sayings are "for all time," they are also distinctly "of an age" and of a country, that age being the first century of our era, and that country Palestine. Not only does all the internal evidence point to one Man as the Author of this body of teaching, but we know also what manner of Man this was. He stands before us as a Child of His people, of His religion, of His time, of His "own country." We see Him intimately familiar

with the life of His contemporaries, with the operations of the farm and the fishing-boat, drawing upon all classes of society for His illustrations, and utilising His material in an unrivalled series of character sketches; indeed, there is hardly an avocation or social grade that is not represented in His picture gallery, and everywhere the sureness of His touch speaks of first-hand observation and direct knowledge. No man was ever more at home in the world of nature or the world of men; no one mingled more freely with the life around him, and that in no spirit of condescension, but as one with it, fully understanding it in all its phases, reading the hearts of men with the same practised glance with which He discerned the signs of the sky. There was thus about Him not an atom of either the Pharisee's or the hermit's—least of all, the "intellectual's"—aloofness from ordinary humanity; in spite of a consummate ease of bearing, and a total absence of what we nowadays call class-consciousness, there was no disguise of His lowly extraction, or of His status as a mechanic—a "hand-worker," to use an expressive Germanism. He was sprung from the common people, who hailed Him as one of themselves, and heard Him gladly as He clothed sublime truths in simple language, driving home His precepts by means of apt illustrations taken from His hearers' daily surroundings and accustomed pursuits. If ever a teacher stood revealed at full length in the substance and the manner of His message, that Teacher is Jesus Christ, as He meets us in the first three Gospels.

It is a unique teaching and a unique personality which we discover in these brief documents—both historic, both authentic, both dynamic, both together forming the supreme manifestation and instrument of the Most High, the power of God unto salvation. For the teaching of Jesus and the Person of Jesus are not detachable from one another: they are not two but one, mutually interpretative, a matchless amalgam. We see Jesus in these plain records as truly, simply, lovably human, and as grandly, shiningly, majestically Divine ; we see Him as One who hath not where to lay His head, subject to hunger and thirst, acquainted with want and pain, with grief and death—we see Him, too, as the Teacher of ageless truth concerning God and man, Himself the Revealer of both, " our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord." A more real, a more vivid, a more convincing portrait has never been drawn by supreme literary craftsmanship than that which looks out at us from the artless pages of our three earlier Evangelists.

II

There remains, however, yet another witness to be heard—a witness who is commonly appealed to as specially authoritative, supposed to be an unnamed disciple who is represented as having enjoyed the special confidence and affection of his Master, and whom Christian tradition identifies with the apostle John. We have already said that the differences between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel are so far-reaching and

of such importance as to call for a more detailed examination of this witness; in approaching that task, we are fully aware how difficult it must be for many devout souls to conduct such an investigation as the one on which we are about to set out, in a dispassionate frame of mind, and would ask the reader all the more to try to divest himself of bias so far as possible. The estimate to be formed of the historical value of the Fourth Gospel constitutes the crux of any and every inquiry concerning the Person of Jesus Christ; and until we have clearly faced the Johannine problem, and come to a conclusion regarding it, there will be very little use in our going further.

Every reader of the Gospels, even the least critical, is more or less aware of a difference of atmosphere which distinguishes the Fourth Gospel from the Synoptics—a difference which meets him on the very threshold; everybody, in hearing, say, two or three of the short parables in Matt. xiii. and a dozen verses from any of the discourses in the Fourth Gospel, read successively, would know without being told the respective places to which to assign each of these fragments. What, however, is not generally realised, and what we shall have to point out in the following pages, is that alike as regards the Person of Jesus, the course of His ministry, and the substance and manner of His teaching, the Fourth Gospel presents a picture essentially other than that which we receive from the Synoptic Evangelists; the preliminary question, therefore, which we must decide before we can

deal profitably with any of those to which we desire to find answers in subsequent chapters of this book, is whether the Fourth Gospel can be regarded as history.

As a rule that question is supposed to be settled by the Gospel's traditional authorship ; it is commonly assumed to be the work of an eye-witness, of the apostle John, and if this assumption is well founded, it is thought reasonable to infer that the authorship guarantees the character of the contents of the treatise. We should not go far wrong in summing up the habitual attitude towards our problem in the sentence : " The Fourth Gospel is historical because it is John's." Such a method of reasoning, however, although it has the support of scholars of vast learning, seems to us a complete inversion of the true order to be followed ; in other words, the main question to be asked is whether this Gospel commends itself as historical—then, and only then, does the question of its authorship so much as arise. *The authenticity of the Fourth Gospel depends upon its historicity, and not vice versâ.*

Regarded from this standpoint, the immense erudition and unwearied industry which have been expended upon showing that " external evidence,"—the testimony of early Christian writers—affirms the Johannine authorship of this Gospel, seem to us to establish very little. The first explicit attestation naming the apostle as the author of the Gospel, is that of Irenæus, who was bishop of Lyons in Gaul, and wrote about the year 175 A.D. Now, Irenæus was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself

is supposed to have been a disciple of John, and hence his testimony is regarded as having great value. Yet, remarkable to say, when this same Irenæus conducts a controversy with certain persons who do not admit the authority of the Fourth Gospel, he does so, not by simply stating what he knew about the apostolic origin of that work, but by the puerile plea that there *must* be four Gospels, just as there are four winds. Still more strangely, Polycarp himself, whose writings we possess, makes no reference to the presence of the apostle John in Ephesus ; while on the other hand a contemporary of Polycarp's, Papias, tells us that in collecting the reported sayings of Jesus, he had recourse to two of the Lord's disciples, John the *presbyter* and Aristion. It is thought therefore that Irenæus confused this *presbyter* John with the apostle, and some eminent scholars, such as Professor Harnack and Principal Garvie, hold that it was this presbyter who composed the Gospel. What is of more importance to note in this connection, is that Irenæus is a notoriously inexact witness in matters relating to the Gospels and the apostolic age. Thus he confuses James, who is mentioned with Cephas and John as one of the "pillars" in Gal. ii. 9 (cp. Acts xv. 13), with James the brother of John, of whose execution by Herod we read in Acts xii. 2 ; while he boldly states concerning Luke's Gospel that it represents Paul's addresses on the life of Christ, as taken down by the Evangelist! Clearly, testimony from such a quarter has to be received with caution, to say the least.

Beyond this passing illustration, we do not intend to devote any space to this question of external evidence to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, for the reasons already stated. Critical methods and standards in the second century were not what they are in the twentieth ; and that a second-century writer speaks of a certain writing as composed by a certain author proves only that he believes it to have been so composed—it does not settle the question of either its authorship or its historical character in the least. The evidence which alone can be legitimately invoked to decide on the historicity of the Fourth Gospel, is *internal* evidence, and to the examination of this we must now address ourselves.

When we stated that the difference in the atmosphere of the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel meets the reader on the very threshold of the latter, we said what was quite literally accurate. The opening sentence of the Fourth Gospel—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—proclaims the dominating conception of the Evangelist, the thesis of which the whole of his treatise is merely the elaboration. Now, this conception is one absolutely foreign to the Synoptical writers; in addition to this, it is absolutely foreign to Palestinian soil. But we know, moreover, in which direction to look for the source from which the Fourth Evangelist derived this idea of the Divine Word, though he did not do so mechanically, but with modifications of his own. That source is the Jewish-Hellenistic

religious philosophy, which had its most eminent representative in Philo of Alexandria, whose writings date from the generation preceding that of Jesus. Without maintaining that our Evangelist borrowed directly from Philo, there can be no doubt that he breathed the air of this Jewish Hellenism, and in many ways underwent its influence. It is in Philo that we find the conception of "a second God"; it is Philo who states that the Logos or Word Himself is God and the Son of God; who makes the Word the Agent of creation, "through whom the world was framed"; who applies to this Word the attributes of Light and Life. According to Philo, "the Logos exists in heaven; reveals the name of God; possesses supernatural knowledge and power; is continually at work; is eternal; is free from sin; instructs and convinces; dwells in the souls of men; is the food of the soul"; etc., etc. What the Fourth Evangelist did was to identify the Logos with the historical Figure of Jesus Christ—a proceeding destined to be of the highest possible importance for the subsequent development of Christology; here we simply have to note that this dominating thought of the Fourth Evangelist's is one which removes him altogether from the far greater simplicity of the Synoptists.[1]

[1] It is not only the Logos idea which the Fourth Evangelist derived from this school of thought; he shared also its peculiar conception and treatment of history—in other words, its profound indifference to historical accuracy, as we understand it. Outward occurrences, from this school's point of view, are relatively

But quite apart from this conception of the Logos, which differentiates once for all between the Synoptic and the Johannine presentation of Christ, the mere extent of the divergencies of the Fourth Gospel from the earlier ones must needs come as a surprise to those who have not made a special study of the subject. We may state that extent succinctly by saying that if we represent the total contents of each Gospel by the figure 100, those of the Fourth Gospel will show only eight coincidences with the Synoptics, as against ninety-two peculiarities.[1] The quantity of the material peculiar to the Johannine narrative is thus by itself sufficient to challenge attention, and to justify a demand for an explanation which can hardly be said to be forthcoming. For it is surely not a convincing argument to urge the author's supposed intimacy with his Lord to account for the facts disclosed by a comparison of his Gospel with the Synoptics. Such an intimacy—were it proved that the author was, indeed, a close friend of Christ's—might explain the presence of a certain proportion of additional material in his work; but when this amounts to nine-tenths of the whole, it is plain that the theory proves inadequate.

unimportant, because they represent the realm of seeming, and are mere transient symbols of ideas, which latter are regarded as the true and only realities. Hence a freedom in dealing with historical material which proves a source of bewilderment to the Western reader, until he understands the writer's outlook.

[1] So Stroud, *Harmony of the Gospels*, quoted by Carpenter, *First Three Gospels*, p. 35, note.

Neither is it possible, on this or any other theory, to account satisfactorily for the circumstance that the points of agreement between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics should be so few as to admit of the following easy enumeration, *viz.*,—The cleansing of the Temple ; the feeding of the multitudes ; the walking on the sea ; the anointing of Jesus by a woman ; His entry into Jerusalem ; His indication of the betrayer at the last meal ; His prediction of Peter's denial ; His passion and resurrection.

Startling, however, as is this paucity of agreements —agreements which, it must be remembered, are only general for the most part, leaving room for considerable discrepancies as to details—both the quantity and, above all, the quality of the Fourth Gospel's peculiarities, alike as regards omissions and the introduction of fresh material, increase our wonder. Let us render ourselves some account in the first place of episodes and incidents omitted by the Fourth Evangelist. These include the following :—(i) The Baptism of our Lord—for while John i. 29—34 shows the Evangelist's acquaintance with the Synoptic tradition, it contains no trace of a statement to the effect that John baptised Jesus ; (ii) The Temptation ; (iii) The message of the imprisoned Baptist to Jesus, and our Lord's reply ; (iv) The institution of the Lord's Supper ; (v) The agony in Gethsemane ; (vi) The carrying of the Cross by Simon of Cyrene ; (vii) The despairing cry from the Cross. The question at once arises, Can these omissions be

accidental? Or have the incidents omitted some common characteristic which would explain their non-appearance in the Fourth Evangelist's pages? We may at once set aside the theory which seeks to dispose of the difficulty by stating that the Fourth Gospel is intended merely to *supplement* the Synoptic narratives, so that the Evangelist feels at liberty to leave out what his predecessors have already chronicled. That theory proves untenable on three grounds: *first*, because the Fourth Gospel nowhere states that it is written with any such supplementary purpose; *second*, because, as even our meagre list of agreements proves, the Fourth Evangelist does relate, when it suits him to do so, incidents recorded by the Synoptists; and *third*, because we can discover a motive adequate to explain the omissions enumerated above.

Let us take, first of all, that of the Lord's Supper, which stands rather in a category by itself. That a witness and partaker of the last solemn meal which the Master took with His disciples should, in his record of that ever-memorable occasion, have forgotten to mention its central and most noteworthy incident, is in itself too improbable for credence; and the difficulty is not met by a recent apologist's suggestion that "it was no doubt unnecessary at the time at which the Gospel was written to repeat words that were in common use in the Church." That is not the question at all; the question is, whether an account of that meal which passes over the institution of the communion rite is not to that extent seriously untrue

to fact. As Professor Burkitt says, "We cannot suppose the Fourth Evangelist to have been ignorant of it. . . . We can only regard his silence as deliberate. He must have deliberately left out this exceedingly important incident; and thereby, so far as the mere narrative of facts is concerned, he creates a false impression of the scene."[1] Not only does he do so, but he inserts in it an episode which is totally unknown to the Synoptists, *viz.*, the washing of the disciples' feet by the Lord—an episode which, had it been historical, could hardly have failed to find its way, through Peter, into Mark's pages. But why the Evangelist's "deliberate silence" on the institution of the Christian rite of the common meal? The reason is that he has already (in ch. vi.) given at great length an exposition of Eucharistic doctrine in a distinctly "advanced" form, culminating in the public declaration, "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." After this, the actual incident recorded by the Synoptists would be almost in the nature of an anti-climax—at best a weakened repetition; and hence he is content to pass it over altogether. That, of course, is not the manner of the historian, but is quite reconcilable with the attitude of a writer whose avowed object (xx. 30, 31) was to inculcate a certain theology. We can well understand that an eminent English Catholic scholar like Dr. Barry should tell us that "this Gospel

[1] *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, p. 224.

has a *symbolic* intention," and that he should quote with approval a German Catholic writer, Dr. Schanz, who says, "The character of this Gospel is neither strictly historical nor strictly dogmatic; *but the latter element predominates.*"

When, however, we turn to the other omissions enumerated above, the purpose and motive by which the Evangelist is actuated grow even more apparent. He is guided throughout by his conception of Jesus as the Divine Logos made flesh, a Being of altogether superhuman elevation, and eliminates accordingly such features as seem to him out of harmony with this view. As to the Baptism, we know, by comparing Matthew's account with Mark's, that this incident became at an early date a stumbling-block to Christian believers, who saw in it something derogatory to the supremacy of their Lord. Matthew accordingly represents the Baptist as performing the rite reluctantly, protesting against the incongruity of the proceeding; the Fourth Gospel carries the process simply a step further by obliterating the episode altogether. It is the same with the Temptation, the same with the struggle in Gethsemane, the same with the despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" All these seemed to the writer irreconcilable with the position and dignity of Him who was the incarnate Mind of God. He cannot admit the suggestion of bodily weakness implied in the traditional carrying of the Cross by Simon of Cyrene, but directly contradicts it

(xix. 17) by stating that " He went out, bearing the Cross for Himself." Neither can he find any room for the imprisoned Baptist's doubting message, " Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another ? " Has he not, contrary to the testimony of the Synoptists, made the Baptist recognise Jesus as the Messiah from the very first ? The Fourth Evangelist's very silence concerning the virgin birth springs from the same motive : such a method of entry into the world—a human birth and infancy, with the weakness and dependence pertaining thereto—strikes him as out of keeping with the status of One who could speak of the glory which He had with God before the world was (xvii. 5), and declare His pre-existence in the startling formula, " Before Abraham was, I am " (viii. 58). How could He " through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made," have been " subject to " (Luke ii. 51) the bidding of a putative father and an earthly-human mother !

But the foregoing omissions do not by any means complete the list of those Synoptic features which we miss from the pages of the Fourth Gospel. When we find that the latter contains *no* mention of that which is the dominant idea of the other three, *viz.*, the Kingdom of God[1] ; when we find that it contains *no* parables, *no* cures of demoniacs, *no* ritual disputes[2] ; when we find

[1] With one exception, *viz.*, John iii. 3, 5 ; but " ' the Kingdom of God ' is not a Johannine phrase." (Armitage Robinson, *The Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel.*)

[2] " Why was Jerusalem so fatally hostile ? " asks Dr. Robinson

in it no mention whatever of such familiar classes of persons as the scribes,[1] or the publicans and sinners, we begin to ask ourselves in some amazement whether this is indeed a version of the same events which we read in the Synoptics, or whether we are not as a matter of fact dealing with "another Gospel."

Astonishing, however, as are these blanks in the Fourth Gospel, the additions which the Johannine writer makes to the Synoptic tradition are more remarkable still. Thus we find in his pages a new and mysterious figure introduced, that of an unnamed "disciple whom Jesus loved"—a personage commonly identified, and probably intended to be identified, with the apostle John.[2] What makes the introduction of that figure the more

(*op. cit.*, p. 16). The answer is that Jerusalem was the very centre of the ritual and ceremonial system which our Lord so strenuously opposed; but from the Fourth Gospel we should never have learned that this opposition was one of the most prominent features in His ministry. If this Gospel, as is frequently urged, sets itself specially to record the Judæan ministry (*ibid.* p. 15), the practical absence of this particular feature becomes less comprehensible than ever.

[1] Except in viii. 3, which, like the whole episode in which it occurs—that of the woman taken in adultery—forms no part of the original text of the Gospel.

[2] Does the Fourth Evangelist desire at the same time to identify *himself* with this unknown disciple, and so with the apostle John? It is commonly suggested that he chose that particular designation from motives of delicate reserve and shrinking modesty, as an alternative to giving his own name; but surely such a self-description would appear to breathe anything

remarkable, is the frequency with which we find this disciple mentioned in some connection with the chief of the apostles, Peter, and always in such a manner as to imply the nameless one's superiority. When Peter wishes to learn who the traitor spoken of by the Lord may be, it is through this disciple that he makes his inquiry (xiii. 24). It is the latter who, through his acquaintance with the high priest, is instrumental in enabling Peter to enter that functionary's court (xviii. 16). It is this disciple who accompanies Peter to the sepulchre, but arrives there first (xx. 4). It is this disciple who first discerns the risen Lord's identity at the sea of Tiberias, and tells Peter of it (xxi. 7). Finally, it is this disciple who, notwithstanding Peter's jealousy, is privileged to tarry till the coming of his Lord, while Peter receives a parting rebuke (xxi. 22). All these narrative touches are totally unknown to the Synoptists, and their complete silence on this whole series of incidents is not satisfactorily explained if we are to regard them as history.[1]

rather than modesty! Of course, even the most explicit claim on the Evangelist's part that his Gospel was John's would no more prove it to be authentic than similar claims in 2 Peter (i. 1 and 18) are nowadays held to prove the authenticity of that epistle. It seems, however, more in accord with probability to conclude, as Schmiedel does, that if the Fourth Evangelist, in using the phrase, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," meant to refer to the apostle John, we may take this as indirect but very cogent evidence that the Evangelist and the apostle are *not* one and the same person. (*Evangelium u.s.w. d. Johannes*, p. 10.)

[1] The theory propounded by Wernle amongst others, if some-

But more directly significant are the miracles peculiar to the Fourth Gospel, such as the changing of water into wine at Cana ; the restoration of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, after thirty-eight years' suffering ; the cure of the man blind from his birth ; and finally, the culminating marvel of all, the raising of Lazarus. Here it has to be specially borne in mind that while in the Synoptics Jesus exhibits the greatest aversion to giving "signs,"[1] the miracles in the Fourth Gospel fall distinctly and avowedly under that category, having for their object the manifestation of His glory, and the awakening of belief in Him (ii. 11). No one would say that the miracle at Cana sprang from motives of pity or benevolence; it was a mere exhibition of superhuman power, and pointless apart from that object. The same holds true of the raising of Lazarus ; indeed, we are told that Lazarus was allowed to die, and his resuscitation was postponed, for the express purpose of heightening the effect of the miracle, and "to the intent ye may believe" (xi. 15). As the feeding of the multitudes is

what too categorically stated, is at least deserving of mention. He sees in this hinted rivalry between the two *disciples* a real rivalry between two *traditions ;* while the Synoptic tradition rested largely upon the authority and the recollections of Peter, the Fourth Gospel attempts to supersede this by claiming to represent the testimony of an eye-witness, who was moreover on terms of quite exceptional intimacy with the Lord, and entrusted by Him with His mother's care. (Wernle, *Quellen d. Lebens Jesu*, pp. 12—14.)

[1] See Chapter iii., pp. 153 ff.

made the occasion of exhibiting Jesus as the Bread of life; as the cure of the man blind from birth is the vehicle of His self-revelation as the Light of the world; so the raising of Lazarus serves as the background for the momentous declaration of Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life. Had the Synoptists failed to record one or the other of these great statements, one might have attributed the circumstance to accident, without straining probability; but when we find every one of them missing from the three earlier Gospels, so simple an explanation will not serve. The Synoptists must either have been ignorant of these declarations having been made, or they must have deemed them to be not sufficiently important to record; but how could either be the case if those arresting words had really fallen from the Master's lips? Is it likely that such highly important material, after inexplicably escaping the attention of the Synoptists, was rescued from oblivion by the Evangelist who confessedly wrote his Gospel after the others had been composed—*i.e.*, at a time when there had been at least further room for the growth and elaboration of tradition?

The question we have just asked applies with particular force to the miraculous raising of Lazarus; it is, as we have already said, the crowning "sign" of all those recorded in the Fourth Gospel, and for that reason alone calls for our special attention. Is this incident history? If so, how are we to explain the silence of the

Synoptic Gospels, and especially that of Mark, concerning this event? The case cannot be better stated than in the words of Professor Burkitt: "If the events occurred as told in the Fourth Gospel, if they were as public as the Fourth Evangelist insists, so fraught with influence upon the action both of friends and foes, they could not have been unknown to a well-informed personage like 'Mark,' nor could he have had any reason for suppressing a narrative at once so public and so edifying. . . Is it possible that anyone who reads the continuous and detailed story of Mark from the Transfiguration to the Entry into Jerusalem can interpolate into it the tale of Lazarus and the notable sensation which we are assured that it produced? Must not the answer be that Mark is silent about the raising of Lazarus because he did not know of it? And if he did not know of it, can we believe, as a matter of fact, that it ever occurred?" [1] Moreover, we are explicitly told by the Fourth Evangelist that it was this miracle which directly brought about the crisis, the chief priests and Pharisees, immediately on its occurrence, setting about in earnest to effect the capture of Jesus; was it likely that an incident so fraught with momentous consequences should have been simply passed over by the Synoptists?

The attempts which have been made to get over these difficulties illustrate—if we may say so without seeming to lack in the respect due to eminent scholars—nothing

[1] *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, pp. 222, 223.

so much as the desperate nature of the case. Why did Mark, to say nothing of Matthew and Luke, who were largely dependent upon him, make no mention of this miracle? It is a favourite explanation to urge that as Mark "has already told of one instance of the raising of the dead," "he need not tarry to tell another, even if it had reached his ears;"[1] that these other raisings, *viz.*, of Jairus's daughter and the widow's son at Nain, were not behind the story of Lazarus in delicacy and tenderness, and that the Synoptists might have "deliberately preferred to relate one of these."[2] But this plea leaves out of sight the sufficiently obvious fact that the raising of Lazarus stands on a totally different level from those recorded by the Synoptic writers. In both the latter cases, Jesus renders help from sheer compassion, and as soon as He is appealed to, under circumstances, moreover, which leave room for the supposition that the border line between life and death had not been actually crossed; indeed, in one of the instances in question, we have His own assurance that death had not really taken place (Mark v. 39). In the story of Lazarus everything is different; we are told that the Lord refused to go to His friend when he was sick, though entreated to do so; that He purposely delayed going to Bethany until such time had elapsed as would have caused

[1] J. Armitage Robinson, *The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel*, p. 43.

[2] Prof. Gwatkin, *The Raising of Lazarus*, Contemp. Review, April, 1908.

the dead body to enter the initial stages of putrefaction; that He treated the episode from first to last for the purpose of His own glorification (xi. 4). The circumstantiality, the consummate literary art with which the story is told, the way in which the whole narrative leads up to the grand climax—all these things show that this sign was totally removed from the homely simplicity of what we are now asked to regard as parallel incidents. What a contrast between the tender "Talitha cumi," spoken when the crowd had been excluded from the sick-chamber, and the majestic "Lazarus, come forth," pronounced in the presence of a vast concourse! If in the one case publicity had been avoided, must we not say that in the other it had been sought? Surely, if, as Professor Gwatkin says, "the purpose of the Evangelists is . . . to show what manner of man the Lord was," the Synoptists would not have "deliberately preferred" to neglect the most characteristic and impressive incident in His ministry in favour of less impressive ones.

Again, it is suggested that the Synoptists may have left out the story of Lazarus for the reason that the Jews sought to put him to death, and any reference to his miraculous return to life might have exposed him to renewed risks, while the Fourth Evangelist, writing at a later time, when Lazarus had probably already died, was free to record the whole truth. "There are many stories," says Professor Gwatkin,[1] "even some of passing notoriety, which no right-minded man will care to

[1] *loc. cit.*

publish till certain persons have been placed beyond the reach of danger: and the raising of Lazarus may very well have been one of these." What this theory fails to explain is the difference that could have been made to Lazarus by the Synoptists' mention of a deed which, so far from having been done in a corner, had been performed with the utmost and most deliberate publicity, and of which his very existence was a constant reminder. This resuscitation was not likely to be forgotten—if it had taken place—by the multitudes who had witnessed it; the suggestion that it would have been dangerous to Lazarus for the earlier Evangelists to repeat in writing what must have been already a matter of common knowledge, is simply lacking in plausibility.

We select, out of numerous other points which must be passed over in a cursory examination like the present, one final circumstance for comment. While the Fourth Evangelist tells us that it was the raising of Lazarus that hastened the arrest and execution of Jesus, the Synoptists give us to understand that the catastrophe was immediately occasioned by the cleansing of the Temple. On this we suggest in the first place that the Synoptic explanation is inherently probable, while that of the Fourth Gospel is inherently improbable. An act of violence and disorder within the precincts of the Temple was calculated to inflame both priests and Pharisees to fury, while at the same time it not improbably alienated a good deal of popular sympathy from Jesus: on the other hand, the stupendous miracle of the raising of

Lazarus, performed in full sight of the multitudes, would have caused popular enthusiasm on behalf of the Lord to reach such a height that the juncture would have been singularly inopportune for His arrest. In the second place, the Synoptists, in relating the episode of the cleansing of the Temple as ushering in the end of the ministry, instead of at the very beginning, as the Fourth Evangelist does, follow the more convincing historical order. That this turbulent affair should have taken place in the very opening stages of our Lord's public activity, without entailing any consequences whatever—that Jesus should have been allowed to come and go freely in the capital after such an act—runs counter to all historical probability ; yet that is how the Fourth Evangelist represents the matter.

An endeavour has, indeed, lately been made[1] to depreciate, or at least to weaken, the contention that according to the Synoptists it was the cleansing of the Temple, according to the Fourth Evangelist the raising of Lazarus, which directly accelerated the final tragedy. We confess that such an attempt to get rid of the discrepancy between the two traditions surprises us. When we are told that in the Synoptics "no distinct incidents are emphasised as specially hastening on the crisis," we merely turn to Mark xi. 18, where the incident of the cleansing is immediately followed by the words, "And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought how they might destroy Him." On the other

[1] J. Armitage Robinson, *op. cit*

hand, when we read it described as "altogether an exaggeration to say that St. John represents the raising of Lazarus as the immediate cause which led to our Lord's arrest and death," all we can reply is that we are not able to read any other meaning into John xi. 47—53, ending with, "*From that day forth* they took counsel that they might put Him to death." If these words do not mean that the raising of Lazarus is represented by the Fourth Evangelist as the "immediate cause which led to our Lord's arrest and death" we must despair of extracting its plain sense from any plain statement.

Instead of trying the reader's patience by prolonging this particular inquiry, we will simply adduce one significant testimony. There was probably no more conservative New Testament scholar in recent times than the late Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, Dr. Salmon. We are told of him that "there was a time when Dr. Salmon was ready to resolve every contradiction in the Gospel history. But in his old age, the time when men grow more conservative, he, through the closer study of the Gospels which he then undertook, was led to accept contradictions in the Gospels, and calmly to ask, why not?" He left behind him a treatise on *The Human Element in the Gospels*, in which he naturally had occasion to deal with the raising of Lazarus; and after carefully considering it in every detail, we read that "with painful reluctance he came to the conclusion that it had not occurred." When we remember that the whole bent of this great scholar's mind was in favour of the traditional

position, the full significance of such an admission from such a quarter will not be lost upon the reader. Yet if an episode of this character and importance could be related in detail in the Fourth Gospel without having ever happened, what is the general claim of that Gospel to rank as a historical document?[1]

In view of what seems to us the inevitable answer to this question, we will address ourselves to only one more point in this comparison of the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptics, but a point of the highest importance. We are referring to both the form and the substance of our Lord's teaching, as related by the Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist respectively, concerning which we have no hesitation in saying that a greater contrast is not conceivable. Instead of the clear, crisp, aphoristic style rendered familiar to us by the three earlier Gospels, instead of the preaching of repentance and the Kingdom of God, the Fourth Evangelist gives us long allegorising discourses turning chiefly upon Christ Himself, His nature, His office, His pre-existence—a doctrine of which the Synoptics do not contain a trace—His relation to the Father, and the necessity of belief in Him. In the Synoptics everything is concrete, tangible, racy of the soil: in the Fourth Gospel everything is abstract, elusive, metaphysical. In the Synoptics Jesus speaks in the language, and appeals to the experience, of the people: in

[1] On the probable genesis of the story, see Chapter iii., pp. 172—174.

the Fourth Gospel the language spoken by every one—by Jesus, by the Baptist, by the Evangelist himself—is that of a solemn mysticism, possessing a beauty and impressiveness of its own, but as unlike as possible to that other, homelier music to which the parables and Beatitudes are set.

It is, indeed, sometimes urged that the discourses peculiar to the Fourth Gospel represent the "esoteric" teaching of the Lord, supposed to have been addressed by Him to His inner circle of disciples, as distinct from His preaching to the multitudes. But as soon as this general theory is scrutinised in detail, it is seen to be without foundation. It is simply not the case that only those among the Johannine discourses which are addressed to the disciples exhibit the Johannine characteristics; the thoughts, the style, the vocabulary, the circle of ideas, are precisely the same when the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel speaks to the people at large, or to individual non-initiate hearers. Whether His audience consists of "the Jews,"[1] or the disciples, or of Nicodemus, or of the Samaritan woman—always and everywhere is the language of the Johannine Christ the same and unmistakable, moving among the same abstract and allegorical conceptions. And, as we said already, it is not only Jesus, but other characters, too, who speak the same dialect, who move in

[1] This manner of referring to the Lord's countrymen and co-religionists constitutes another of the Fourth Gospel's marked peculiarities, occurring more than thirty times in the first eleven chapters alone.

the circle of the same philosophy of religion, the dialect and the philosophy of the Evangelist himself, and of the Alexandrian School which had so deeply influenced his thinking; let anyone read John iii. 27—36, and he will find it difficult to say where the words of the Baptist end, and those of the Evangelist begin.

And there is yet another consideration which proves fatal to the hypothesis that the differences between the Synoptic and the Johannine discourses of our Lord are those between public preaching and private teaching. If this were a true explanation, we might expect differences of *treatment*, but identity of *subject*. We might, *e.g.*, find Jesus expounding His conception of the kingdom of God to the disciples in a manner which the crowds could not have understood—but that our Lord should, in His private teaching, have practically never alluded at all to that kingdom which was the centre and staple of His public addresses, is simply incredible; and yet we have seen already that the kingdom of God is "not a Johannine phrase." The matter cannot be better summarised than by Jülicher, who says: "A Jesus who taught alternately in the manner of Matt. v.—vii. and in that of John xiv.—xvii. is a psychological impossibility." We may choose between the Synoptic and the Johannine teaching, regarding one or the other as authentic; but we cannot ascribe them to the same mind. And when we have said this, we have already committed ourselves to the position, that we may choose between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, regarding

either the former or the latter as historical—but not both. The more carefully we compare the Synoptic with the Johannine presentation of the events themselves, of their sequence, of the character and message of Jesus—and we have of necessity omitted reference to a very large number of important details—the more the impression grows upon us that what these two sources respectively set forth is two lives, two characters, two types of teaching, only one of which can belong to history.

With this alternative before us, and allowing our judgment to be influenced by nothing save the sheer weight of the evidence and of intrinsic probability, we have no choice but to pronounce in favour of the Synoptics.

But have we, then, done with the Fourth Gospel when we have decided that it is not, in the strict sense an historical document, and therefore *ipso facto* not the work of the apostle John? Nothing would be less true or less just. The truth was apprehended by more than one of the early Fathers, *e.g.*, by Clement of Alexandria, who said of the Fourth Evangelist that, "finding the literal facts to have been set forth in the [*viz.*, other] Gospels, he composed a spiritual Gospel." In precisely the same spirit Origen says that "if all the four Gospels are to be received, we must recognise that their truth does not consist in their literal accuracy, and that when the writers could not at once speak the truth both spiritually and literally, they preferred the spiritual to the literal, since a spiritual truth was often preserved

in what might be called a literal untruth." Yet another Father, Epiphanius, does not hesitate to say that most of the things stated by the Fourth Evangelist were spiritual or allegorical, the literal facts having already been made plain. Is there not in these pronouncements a hint for us as regards the right use and the right valuation of this Gospel?

There are more kinds of truth than one: there is truth of statement, and truth of interpretation; the one belongs to the faithful chronicler, the other to the rare soul of genius. The permanent value of the Fourth Gospel is not to be sought in its fidelity or otherwise to outward fact, but in the author's exceptional spiritual insight, that rare endowment which enabled him to give us such a reading of the fact of Christ, of the meaning of His personality, as has vitally affected Christianity, and contributed immeasurably to making it a world-power. The spiritual value of this Gospel is beyond all computation. The Christ whom the Fourth Evangelist shows us is no longer merely the Galilean Teacher, the hoped-for Messiah and Deliverer of His nation from political bondage, but that Son who makes us free indeed. Taking Him out of

"all temporal and immediate circumstance,"

this writer presents Him to us as the Incarnate Word, the unique Son and Revealer of God, because spiritually one with Him, the full-orbed revelation of God's Fatherhood and man's sonship, the Way, the Truth, and the

Life. If in doing so the Evangelist throws the substance of his own reflections upon his sublime Theme into the form of discourses uttered by the Lord Himself, he follows a recognised literary convention of antiquity, never intended to deceive. Let us clearly grasp the essential doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, the kernel of luminous truth which remains after all that is secondary and adventitious has been stripped away: throughout his pages this writer elaborates the idea of a Divine Humanity, the unity of God and man, shown forth and indubitably manifested in Jesus Christ. That unity, the Evangelist saw, could only be demonstrated in an actual personality, and received that demonstration in Him who is "the flower of man and God."

That is the sense in which the Fourth Gospel must ever retain its place of pre-eminence as the greatest of our witnesses to the Son of God, because it is indispensable to a right understanding of His significance, and thus in the last resort of more and deeper value to us than the most literally accurate chronicle of external events could have been. That is why this book, though omitting so much that is invaluable in the actual teaching of Jesus, and stating so much that we cannot think of historical occurrence, is, and remains, a priceless possession. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing": do we not seem to hear in these words an echo of Paul's declaration—"Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer"? This nameless writer of the early

second century has given us, not a supplement to, but a commentary on, the Synoptic Gospels; and the immortal achievement of his splendid vision is one without which our faith would have been unspeakably poorer. He has not written—he never intended to write—a history, as history is understood by us; but he can use of himself a saying which he places upon the lips of Christ: "*The words that I have spoken unto you, they are Spirit and are Life.*"

# CHAPTER I

## SON OF MAN OR SON OF GOD?

FEW competent and unbiassed persons would probably be found to dispute the proposition that the one fact of supreme importance in the history of mankind was the life of Jesus Christ. One might subscribe to such a statement without being a Christian at all. It is a simple fact that no one event has ever so profoundly affected the course of human development as the appearance, teaching and death of this Jewish Teacher in the days of the early Roman Empire. The religion of the Hebrews, immeasurably above the level of the surrounding pagan faiths, had been in existence for many centuries, and produced a mighty literature, from which Jesus Himself drew spiritual nourishment and inspiration; but we probably hardly realise how minute the influence of the Hebrew race upon the world had been through all those ages. Yet what Judaism, the parent of so much spiritual genius, had signally failed to achieve in a thousand years, Christianity set itself to accomplish from the very first, triumphing over all obstacles in the deliberate attempt to become a world-religion. Isaiah, with what must have seemed sublime daring, had dreamed of a final consummation when Israel should

be the third with Egypt and with Assyria—a day when Yahweh should say, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance ; but this new-comer among religions appeared upon the scene boldly declaring from the very outset that there could be neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, in Christ Jesus. And the explanation lay in the concluding words of that challenging statement ; it was Christ Jesus who made the universal appeal which Judaism had never made, Christ Jesus in whom all distinctions of race, sex, social status, were transcended and done away. A new principle, a new element, had been introduced into the world, changing the current of events ; and what we see verified in the history of well nigh two thousand years, His followers felt assured of from the first, *viz.*, that in Him a new factor of quite surpassing significance had entered into human affairs.

It is no wonder, though it is a tribute to the immense impression produced by our Lord during His brief and tragic career, that almost from the first men began to seek for an explanation of such a phenomenon, holding it impossible that His entry into the world should have been like that of ordinary men. The fundamental feeling which gave shape to these speculations can hardly be better expressed than in the words of a living writer, who pleads that "if it is reasonable to suppose that a Man, who stands clean outside the common category of men, has a different origin from ordinary men . . .

reason would demand that His difference from men should be shown in the manner of His birth."[1] True, speculation was not bound to take that particular direction in order to account for the uniqueness of Christ's personality, and as a matter of fact the two great theological New Testament writers held different theories of their own; nevertheless the belief which was destined to become the dominant one in the Christian Church is that which asserts that the Lord's birth was itself of a miraculous character, proclaiming Him in the most literal sense, by a supernatural method of generation, the Son of God.

We observed that such theories were man's tribute of admiration to genius and character such as are felt to tower above the common level; but it has to be borne in mind that the doctrine of the miraculous birth of Jesus derives much of its strength from the way in which it has been connected with, and in turn gives support to, certain other dogmas. On the assumption of the total depravity of the race, consequent upon the Fall, only a supernatural agency could arrest this hereditary curse; and if this agency took the form of an Agent, then He must be One in whom that taint and curse were not operative. In other words, only a sinless Christ could, given such a presupposition, be of effect as a Saviour; and the postulate of sinlessness seemed to necessitate, or at least to harmonise with, a mode of birth due to some other process than that in which Adam's

[1] Horton, *My Belief*, p. 146.

guilt was thought to be transmitted from human father to human offspring. While these problems will occupy us in subsequent chapters, we must always preserve a clear consciousness of the intimate inter-connection between the various parts of the traditional theology ; we must remember that they mutually strengthen each other, and that it is impossible to touch one of these doctrines without affecting the rest. Nothing is more comprehensible than the insistence laid by defenders of the miraculous birth upon its general doctrinal significance.

For the present, however, we must not linger over this connection between the virgin birth and other traditional doctrines, but address ourselves at once to what may be called the *a priori* argument in favour of the former. That argument may take either the form of a positive assertion, to the effect that "humanity in its ordinary course could not have produced" such a Being as Jesus Christ,[1] or of a challenge to "account for the appearance of such a Person on the stage of this world"[2]; we propose to consider it first of all under the latter of these forms.

## I

"Can the very appearance on earth of such a Man be satisfactorily accounted for?" asks the writer whom we have just quoted. "How came it to pass that the human family succeeded in producing a Divine Man? And

[1] Dr. Gore in a sermon on *Our Lord's Nativity*.

[2] Morris, *Was Jesus a Divine Man?* Hibbert Journal, April, 1908.

how comes it to pass that, having produced one such Man, it has never produced another? How does it happen that from a tree, not distinguished in general by beauty of fruit or flower, one branch of such surpassing loveliness has sprung?" In dealing with these animated queries, it will, perhaps, be desirable that we should seek to understand what we mean by "accounting" for any phenomenon whatsoever. A phenomenon is accounted for when we can point with sufficient reason to certain antecedent phenomena as having produced it; such and such were the causes—such and such was the result. But in that sense we submit that we can never account for the phenomenon of genius. We are not aware of any process by which it is possible to point to the causes which make one member of a family a superlatively great poet, musician, man of science, while his brothers and sisters, children of the same father and mother, exhibit no spark of a similar gift. Genius of the highest order seldom, if ever, springs even from exceptionally talented parents, but mostly from humdrum, obscure folk who may not even be capable of appreciating the astonishing qualities of their offspring. Perhaps a very commonplace illustration may help us to a clearer apprehension of what it is that happens in such a case. We may think of a number of chemical substances, each one by itself dull and inert; but let these be brought together by happy chance or wise design, combining in certain proportions, and the result of that combination may be something utterly unlike the several component parts. Who could

have predicted, apart from experience, that a combination of hydrogen and oxygen would result in water? Similarly we may think of certain qualities of mind or character lying dormant in two individualities, both ordinary, commonplace, mediocre; then—once more, whether by happy chance or wise design—some of these qualities combine in quite a new and unforeseen manner in one of their children, and the result is some mighty genius. Is it not obvious that while we may be quite unable to account for the process which has produced this astonishing result, we should not, and in fact do not, doubt that the result has been produced in strictly natural order?

But we are asked, with more particular reference to our Lord, How comes it to pass that such a phenomenon has occurred just once, and only once? Why has there never been such another—nay, why has the world not witnessed any advance upon what was attained so long ago? We believe that behind all such pleas there lies one of the commoner misunderstandings of the meaning and methods of evolution. It seems that evolution is somewhat mechanically conceived as a process of rising so general and uninterrupted that one might almost lay it down that each century, or even each generation, occupies a higher level than its predecessors. There is much in such a view that commends it to our natural vanity, encouraging us, like Faust's fatuous *famulus*, to reflect complacently upon "how nobly high *we* have attained;" but it derives scant support from fact, and will not bear reflection. On the one hand,

to quote an *obiter dictum* of one of our youngest, but most brilliant public men, "evolution does not say 'always,' but 'ultimately,'"[1] allowing for many temporary declensions; and on the other, in all that relates to the mind, the general principle of evolution by no means excludes vast and revolutionary "leaps." Above all, evolution does not exclude the occasional irruption of genius, and our inability to account for it is nothing to the purpose. When it is pointed out that Jesus has never been equalled, let alone surpassed, in human history, and that, therefore, He cannot be a product of evolution or the child of human parents, it is surely permissible to remind those who use that argument that it proves too much; for neither has Michael Angelo as an artist, Homer as an epic poet, or Shakespeare as a dramatist, ever been approached, let alone surpassed, in the centuries since they wrought.

In urging these considerations, we have practically already answered Dr. Gore's contention that "humanity in its ordinary course could not have produced a sinless man." The real fact of the matter is that apart from experience we have not the slightest warrant for saying dogmatically what humanity, or nature in general, can or cannot produce. Moreover, as has been well observed by an acute critic of Dr. Gore, nature does not do anything of itself apart from God, but it is God who acts through nature. "It is not a question whether Nature or Humanity of its own will, apart from God, could have produced a sinless Christ, but whether He could

[1] Mr. Winston Churchill, *Savrola*.

have been produced according to the ordinary processes and operations of Nature. Previous to experience, how many events are there in respect of which it might have been said with some confidence that God could not effect these through the ordinary course of Nature; previous to experience, might it not even be held that any one fact in the world is quite as inconceivable as any other possible or imaginable fact?"[1] The rise of life, the beginnings of the evolution of species, the emergence of man—all these might have seemed impossible to be produced in the ordinary course of nature; yet we do not postulate a miracle to account for them. "In the Neolithic age, if the portraiture of a St. Paul, a St. John, a St. Francis, a Shakespeare, an Edison, a Marconi, had been presented to them, men might well have said that humanity in its ordinary course could not produce such beings. But Nature has produced them all." The *onus probandi* rests on those who so positively declare that humanity (or God acting through humanity) *could* not have produced Jesus; then, after establishing this preliminary point, they would have to prove satisfactorily that such a Being could not have been produced except by the particular expedient of a miraculous birth—that only by reason of such a birth could Jesus have been in possession of the attributes in virtue of which He is the Son of God. And only then would it be necessary, from the point of those who base the Divinity of our

[1] C. E. Beeby, *Doctrinal Significance of a Miraculous Birth*, Hibbert Journal, October, 1903.

Lord upon His supernatural birth, to examine the Scriptural evidence for that event.

II

But if it is impossible to maintain, or at least to substantiate, the contention that Jesus, in order to be Himself, *must* have been born of a virgin, it still remains true that so great a fact demands a cause adequate to produce it ; and if Jesus by common consent stands at the head of all humanity, we cannot avoid reverently examining the one established theory which professes to account for His appearance upon earth. Is He, in a sense quite peculiar to Himself, the Son of God—a sense in which He is *not* the Son of man? Was He, or was He not, one of us, the firstborn among many brethren, or is it true that there is a "gulf existing from everlasting to everlasting between Jesus Christ and any human soul"?[1] Was God the Father of Jesus in quite a different way from that in which He is our Father?

"*Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the*

[1] Ballard, *Christian Essentials*, p. 145. In referring to Dr. Ballard's treatment of this subject, we may courteously demur to his statement that "those who were closest to Him [*i.e.*, to Christ] and knew Him best . . . ever treated Him as being not one of themselves." It may be sufficient—since one instance to the contrary invalidates a universal proposition—to point to the fact that Peter on one occasion actually presumed to take Jesus apart, and began to rebuke Him for doing what he, Peter, thought an ill-advised thing! (Mark viii. 32). And the same Peter described his Lord, even after His death and the manifestation of His deathlessness, in such terms as "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works."

*Virgin Mary*" : the doctrine is that of the Church and of the Creed—is it also that of the New Testament ? It is probably correct to say that the average reader of the New Testament has only the faintest idea of the slenderness of the testimony to this doctrine as contained in the sacred volume itself. If we take our earliest witness, the apostle Paul, we shall find his conception to be to the effect that Christ, having pre-existed in heaven, "emptied" and "humbled" Himself in assuming human form, having originally been in the form of God. Holding this view, it would have been most natural for the apostle to strengthen his position by some overt and unmistakable reference to the supernatural birth of the second Adam ; but we may read his letters from end to end without coming upon any such allusion, directly or indirectly. On the contrary, he explicitly speaks of Jesus as "born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3), than which a plainer reference to *human* paternity could not well be framed. Similarly we read in Acts xiii. 23, that in addressing his co-religionists at Antioch he said, after alluding to David, "Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." Now, it is, of course, quite conceivable that Paul was ignorant of the belief in the miraculous birth ; but it is hardly conceivable that, had he known of it, he would have used such language as we have quoted. Indeed, had he been acquainted with that doctrine, he could hardly have failed to mention it.

In addition to the passage just quoted, Acts contains

one other reference to the Saviour's origin; it occurs in Peter's address on the day of Pentecost (ii. 30), where the apostle affirms that David, being a prophet, knew "that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins He would set one on his throne," *viz.*, "this Jesus." It is hardly necessary to say that, since the genealogies attempt to trace the Lord's descent from David through Joseph, Peter's words, like Paul's, could only mean a human paternity in the fullest sense of the word; for the rest we shall scan the Acts of the Apostles in vain for any hint of a virgin birth. But the same holds true of the Epistles of Peter, James, John, and Jude, as well as the Book of Revelation; and this means that we have exhausted the whole New Testament, with the exception of the Gospels, and found no trace of, or allusion to, this doctrine.

Still, it might be contended that while it would have been no more than natural for some of these writers to mention, in passing, a doctrine upon which the Church has laid the greatest weight, the omission might be one of those curious coincidences in which life and literature are so unexpectedly rich: they were not absolutely bound to refer to the matter, and it so happens that they did not. Such an argument, however, cannot apply to the remaining documents of the New Testament, *i.e.*, the Gospels themselves; and when we find that both the earliest and the latest of these witnesses, Mark and the Fourth Evangelist, have not a word to say concerning a miraculous birth, mention of which is entirely confined

to Matthew and Luke, the fact is one which cannot but arrest attention. That they should absolutely never have referred to the fact, had they believed that this was the mode of the Lord's entry into this world, passes credibility. Nothing shows the weakness of a weak position more plainly than attempts to defend it, and to that rule the present instance forms no exception. When, *e.g.*, we are told that Mark's silence is explained by the scope of his Gospel, which intended to set forth our Lord's public ministry, beginning with His baptism, it would really be almost equally convincing to say that the Evangelist does not mention the virgin birth because he does not mention it. The question is, surely, why he should have left so important a fact unmentioned if he knew of it, or believed it to be true. To say, as Professor Orr does, that Mark "keeps within the limit of the public apostolic testimony (Peter's ?), and relates nothing beyond," contributes nothing to the solution of the difficulty. There is no really convincing reason for this alleged self-limitation on the Evangelist's part.

When we turn to the Fourth Gospel, the difficulties of the apologist are increased, for while Mark may have been simply ignorant of a belief which possibly had not crystallised in his time, the Fourth Evangelist had the Synoptics before him; yet he simply ignores the miraculous birth stories. We have already suggested his reasons for doing so; he also had his own theory of the Person of Christ, *viz.*, as the Word made flesh, and while such an event involves a stupendous miracle, he shrank from

associating the Divine Logos with the humiliation and indignities of a human birth, a helpless childhood, and subjection to peasant parents. The homely-heavenly narratives of Matthew's and Luke's opening chapters are as little to be harmonised with the stately mysticism of the Johannine prologue as the Synoptics with the Fourth Gospel generally. Nor is the traditional case advanced by asking, "Can we suppose that John meant to repudiate or contradict the other Gospels?" (Orr). That is precisely what we can suppose, knowing the Fourth Evangelist's method of re-shaping his material; he never hesitates a single moment to throw over the Synoptic tradition when it is not in accord with the ideas which he wishes to set forth, and which to him are the really important matter. The writer who deliberately repudiates and contradicts the earlier Gospels where these venture to ascribe to Jesus the weakness of having His Cross carried for Him, would have small compunction in omitting any other story which did not fit into his doctrinal scheme. In the present instance, having a "higher" doctrine of Christ's origin than the Synoptists, he simply leaves unmentioned an episode for which he has no use. His concern is only secondarily with outward fact—with the affairs of space and time; narrative to him is only the temporal clothing of eternal ideas, to which alone belongs reality—just as the body of Jesus, tangible and vulnerable though it was, represented only the mortal vesture of the immortal Word. The Fourth Evangelist was familiar with Matthew's and Luke's

introductory idylls, but they did not appeal to him, and he passed them over accordingly without hesitation.[1]

III

We come, then, at length, to our only two New Testament sources for the doctrine of the supernatural birth; and it may be as well to say at once that the direct testimony of these witnesses is confined to eight verses in Matthew (i. 18—25) and to two in Luke (i. 34, 35), all the rest of these Gospels being as silent on the subject as the remainder of the New Testament. We shall see later on what inference may be drawn from this fact; for our present purpose, of course, we shall glance at the narratives as a whole.

Are these narratives history? We cannot do better than answer that question in Dr. Horton's words: "History, in the strict sense of the word, begins where Mark and John and Paul begin. The Idyll of the Infancy belongs to another kind of literature. . . . Poetry is as instructive as history, but not in the same way."[2] With this far-reaching admission for a starting-point, we shall set out upon at least a cursory examination of these two sets of narrative.

[1] "Some of his phrases seem directed against the theory of a miraculous birth. He writes, 'It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.' . . . The Logos doctrine of the Fourth Evangelist is clearly meant as an alternative for the miraculous birth. He gives up the Jewish marvel for the Greek wisdom, ideal history for doctrine." (Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, pp. 239, 240.) Cp. also E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 187, 188.

[2] *Devotional Commentary on St. Matthew*, p. 5.

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the only detail in which these two sources can be said to agree is the actual statement that Jesus was born of a virgin; as regards all the rest, they pursue not only independent courses, but courses that occasionally come into direct collision. While, *e.g.*, both Matthew and Luke present us with genealogies of Jesus, these lists are irreconcilable; and even the attempt of harmonists to explain the discrepancies between them, as "owing to the fact that they trace the descent of Jesus along quite distinct lines" (Orr), does not account for the circumstance that in Matthew the father of Joseph is called Jacob, while in Luke his name is Eli! But apart from their obviously unreliable character, these genealogies are remarkable for the one particular in which they are in agreement, *viz.*, their object, which is to follow the ancestry of Jesus *through Joseph*; for we must ask, with Dr. Horton, "of what use was it to trace the descent of Jesus through Joseph, if Joseph was not, in the strict sense, His father at all?"[1] The argument implied in the question is unanswerable; if these genealogies were not inserted with the view of establishing Jesus as "born of the seed of David according to the flesh," *i.e.*, having Joseph for His authentic father, they were not merely irrelevant, but unintelligible. In the words of the author just quoted, "We are . . . to regard Him as the seed of David and Abraham and Adam, through Joseph. If we maintain that this connection with humanity was established only

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

through Mary, we set aside the testimony of the two evangelists who record the virgin birth."[1] Jesus had to be shown to be of the Davidic line in order to be accredited as the genuine Messiah; but this very proof of royal descent is fatal to the virgin birth with which it is not reconcilable.

Serious, however, as are the discrepancies in the genealogies, it is when we turn to the comparison of Matthew's and Luke's opening chapters as a whole that our difficulties really begin. It is not enough to say that the same events are related from different standpoints; each author tells us an entirely distinct series of events, and while each narrative, taken by itself, raises doubts of the gravest character, each also conflicts with the other. If we make up our minds to regard these chapters as poetry, and if we are consistent enough to draw the inferences involved in such a view, no more need be said; unfortunately, however, English opinion is hardly as yet prepared to fulfil the first, nor especially the second, of these conditions, and hence we must enter into, at least, the most outstanding details.

Matthew is not only dominated by the idea that the events which he describes were fulfilments of Old

[1] In justice to Dr. Horton, it should be stated that he regards the paternity of Jesus as a mystery, which, he says, "may be stated thus: Joseph was the father of Jesus, but not in the ordinary way of human generation; His parenthood was the work of the Holy Ghost." We confess that this strikes us as self-contradictory; how could Joseph, under such circumstances, refer to Jesus as "his firstborn"? (*Op. cit.*, p. 5.)

Testament prophecy, but his use of such alleged predictions is of a peculiarly unsatisfactory character. Thus he bases the virgin birth upon the Greek mistranslation of Isa. vii. 14, where the Hebrew term used does not mean "virgin" at all; moreover, a look at the context makes it quite clear that the prophet is referring to contemporary and not to remote contingencies. "In the original of Isaiah, all that is meant is, that before a young woman could conceive and bear a son, deliverance would have come to King Ahaz, and the new-born child should be called 'God with us'" (Horton). Similarly, in telling us of the flight of Joseph and Mary with their infant into Egypt, he is careful to point out that this was a fulfilment of a prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called My son," a verse which has only to be read in its entirety—"When *Israel* was a child, *then* I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt"—to show the purely fanciful nature of its application to an entirely different set of circumstances.[1] He sees a fulfilment of some words of Jeremiah's concerning "a voice heard in *Ramah*" in Herod's massacre of the children at *Bethlehem*,[2] and connects even the Galilean home of Jesus with some alleged

[1] Dr. Horton's cautious suggestion is noteworthy: "That the prophecies, once suggested, might react on the facts and lead to legendary modification is, of course, not to be denied." (*Op. cit.*, p. 15.) Indeed, "legendary modifications" are precisely what we should expect from such a determination to discover everywhere fulfilments of supposed predictions.

[2] Ramah was situated as far to the north of Jerusalem as Bethlehem was to the south.

prophecies to the effect that the Messiah should be called a Nazarene—probably a misreading of Isa. xi. 1, where a "nezer" or "shoot" of Jesse is spoken of.

But, leaving this idiosyncrasy of the Evangelist's on one side, what about the events which he narrates? What about the star seen and followed by the wise men from the East until it stood still over the infant Saviour's birthplace? What about Herod's sanguinary crime in connection with this birth, the manner in which he was foiled, the parents' flight and return after the tyrant's death? It may be impossible to convince those who do not *feel* that these incidents—for none of which there is any historical confirmation—belong to the realm of popular legend, untrammelled by considerations of probability; one question, however, must be asked: Was it possible that One whose early days had been marked by so many marvellous signs could have been allowed to reach manhood in obscurity? Would He not have been pointed out during all the days of His boyhood and youth as the wonder-child over whose birthplace a star had rested, indicating Him to the wise men from the East, who had travelled all the way to do homage and to offer precious gifts to the infant King of the Jews? Amongst a population whose one passion was the Messianic hope, such phenomena would never be forgotten.[1]

Matthew's detailed story is not merely not supported, but implicitly refuted, by Luke's account. Not only

[1] The same considerations apply, of course, to the portents related by Luke as accompanying the Saviour's birth.

does Luke tell us nothing about the star, the wise men, the fruitless massacre of infants, the flight into Egypt, but in his hands the central event receives quite a different setting. His story of the census made by Quirinius, which caused Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, is open to a whole series of chronological and historical objections, which the learning and ingenuity of Sir W. M. Ramsay have done little to remove. Assuming that such a census took place at all about the time of our Lord's birth; assuming that such a census could have been carried out in Judæa and Galilee during the lifetime of Herod, when Rome had as yet no such rights in those territories: it yet passes belief that every householder would have had to register himself at the birthplace of some particular remote ancestor. *Cui bono?* Equally incredible is it that not only householders, but their wives—and still more incredible that not only their wives, but their betrothed—should have had to undertake such a journey. It is true that in the early Sinaitic Syrian manuscript Luke ii. 5 reads "with Mary *his wife*"; but in her then condition nothing short of compelling necessity would have caused Mary to undergo the fatigue and risks of travel—and such necessity did not exist. As has been acutely said, "The whole population is set in motion in order to get Mary to Bethlehem"; and yet, when the entire narrative has been sifted in all its details, we see no reason for modifying the verdict of Mommsen, who declared, with all his unrivalled authority, that no one cognisant of the facts, or

free from doctrinal bias, could credit Luke's account of the census. According to contemporary Jewish opinion, the Christ had to be born in Bethlehem; given this necessity, legend was at no loss to show that in the case of Him who was the Messiah this expectation was fulfilled.

But apart from this question of the enrolment, it is noteworthy that Luke writes in perfect unconsciousness or any persecution, or fear of persecution, on the part of Herod. We are so often told that our Third Evangelist's narrative is written from Mary's standpoint, and that this fact accounts for the peculiarities of his chapters, that we cannot help asking whether it would not have been natural for Mary to make some mention of the danger which threatened her infant, and from which they fled into Egypt; but instead of any such circumstance being mentioned, we read that within little over a month from the birth of Jesus, she openly went to the Temple—apparently without any fear—to present her child to the Lord, and to make the offering enjoined in the case of people of slender means (Lev. xii.). "And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee"—*i.e.*, straightway, and without any interval spent in Egypt. The contradiction between this version and that of Matthew is complete and irreconcilable.

We must, however, now turn our attention to another class of considerations, *viz.*, to certain passages in the Gospels themselves which are incompatible with the

miraculous birth narratives. We have already dealt in passing with the unconvincing plea that Mark observes silence on the subject of our Lord's supernatural birth because his object was merely to deal with His public ministry. But there are two passages in this, our earliest Gospel, which cannot be harmonised either with the virgin birth or with our Evangelist's belief in it. To one of these we had occasion to allude in our introductory chapter, *viz.*, that in which Mary and the Lord's brethren seek to put Jesus under restraint, under the impression that He is of unsound mind. That the phrase "His friends" in Mark iii. 21 really refers to His mother and His brethren, is made clear in verses 31—35,[1] where He refuses to see His family who are waiting for Him outside the house, and in fact disowns them. But could Mary for one moment have thought her eldest Son to be mentally unhinged, had she known what she must have known if the birth-stories reposed on fact? The supposition is impossible, and the other Synoptists accordingly suppressed this highly disconcerting episode. "Orthodox Christians," says an Anglican writer,[2] "wanted most of all something which helped them in preaching the Gospel; it did not particularly help them to know that our Lord's relatives once thought Him mad." This is certainly frank; but it does not explain how Mary *could* think anything of the kind.

[1] Cp. Burkitt, *op. cit.* p. 174, note.

[2] Pullan, *The Christian Tradition*, p. 10; quoted by Carpenter, *The Bible in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 488, note.

The second of these passages, however, has been unsuspectingly taken over by Matthew and Luke from Mark, although it is equally incapable of reconciliation with the theory of a supernatural birth. Matthew tells us that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost: how, then, is it that it was only at His baptism that the Spirit descended upon Him? (Mark i. 10; cp. Matt. iii. 16, Luke iii. 22.) Even if we set aside the high manuscript authority of the Codex Bezæ, which reads in Luke iii. 22, "Thou art My Son; *this day* have I begotten Thee," the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus on the occasion of His baptism implicitly contradicts the view which ascribed His very conception to the operation of that Spirit.

Passing over indecisive passages like those in which third persons, who of course could not in any case have known otherwise, referred to Jesus as the son of Joseph (John i. 45, vi. 42) or the carpenter's son (Matt. xiii. 55), we come to three expressions in Luke ii. which cannot be explained as due to the speaker's ignorance. In verse 33 the Evangelist, speaking in his own person, alludes to "His father and mother"; in verse 14 He speaks of "His parents" (*goneis*); and in verse 48 Mary says "thy father and I." Let us glance at the two episodes in connection with which these unambiguous expressions are used. The first is the occasion of the Infant's presentation in the Temple, when the aged Simeon indicates Him as the Lord's Anointed. "And His father and His mother," we read, "were marvelling at the things which

were spoken concerning Him." Quite apart from the ascription of paternity to Joseph, how are we to understand the "marvel," the evident surprise of the parents, if they knew from before the Child's birth, and especially from the circumstances of that birth, all and more than all that Simeon had told them? The second incident is that of Joseph and Mary's visit to Jerusalem, when Jesus had remained behind in the Temple, unknown to His parents, and the latter sought Him, greatly troubled at His disappearance. Mary's words, when the Boy is found, are full of suggestion: "My child, why have you behaved thus to us? Your father and I have been searching for you in anguish." Is it conceivable that Mary, knowing the truth about her Son's origin—knowing who He was—would have dared to give Him this motherly scolding? Would she have referred to her husband, in speaking to Jesus, as "your father," knowing that He knew that Joseph was not His father at all?

But, it will be asked, is it not the fact, nevertheless, that the same Luke, who thus repeatedly affirms Joseph to be the father of Jesus, also relates the virgin birth? And are we really driven to the unsatisfactory, because self-contradictory, "mystery," that while we may not "maintain that this [*viz.*, our Lord's] connection with humanity was established only through Mary," "Joseph was the father of Jesus, but not in the ordinary way of human generation"? We believe the solution to be far more simple than this; and we shall briefly try to

show both what it is, and on what grounds it is arrived at.

IV

We have seen that so far from the doctrine of a supernatural birth pervading Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, explicit references to such an event are confined to a very few verses—Matt. i. 18—25 and Luke i. 34, 35; we have also seen that the genealogies in both Gospels are irrelevant, unless they are intended, by tracing the Lord's descent through Joseph by natural filiation, to show Him to fulfil the requirements of the Messiah in being "of the seed of David according to the flesh"—a condition which was in itself incompatible with a virgin birth. But if the object, say, of Matthew was to connect Jesus with the royal line through Joseph, would he not have told us in plain terms that Joseph was His father? Now it had been known for a long time that the text of Matt. i. 16 was involved in some measure of uncertainty, the differences among extant manuscripts being such as to "lend plausibility to the idea that the verse did not originally contain the words which assert the virginity of the Lord's mother."[1] Indeed, so far as manuscript authority went, the scholar just quoted was inclined, hypothetically, and as a possibility, to admit that it might "appear that in the original Matthew the genealogy ended with the formula 'Joseph begat Jesus.'" This hypothetical admission received startling

[1] Prof. Swete on the Apostles' Creed (1894), quoted by F. C. Conybeare in the *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1902.

confirmation by the publication of the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript discovered by Mrs. Gibson and Mrs. Lewis, and published by them in 1894, in which Matt. i. 16 reads as follows: "Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph, to whom was espoused Mary the (*or* a) virgin, begat Jesus, who is called Messiah." It is true that, as Professor Orr says, "this reading stands absolutely alone as regards these words"; on the other hand, this particular manuscript is in all other respects allowed to be the most archaic of all texts of the Gospels. What is more, transcriptional probability is entirely in favour of this isolated reading[1]; that is to say, it is unlikely that later copyists, working at a time when the doctrine of the virgin birth was firmly established, would have introduced changes in the text calculated to weaken that dogma. Such a reading could only be of high antiquity; and we are justified in concluding that it fairly establishes what Professor Swete had stated as a possibility, viz., that "in the original Matthew the genealogy ended with the formula 'Joseph begat Jesus,'" thus completing the chain which showed Him to be the true Messiah.

But what about verses 18—25, which tell the story of the virgin birth? It is well known that this doctrine was denied in the earliest days of Christianity by the Gnostic leader Cerinthus amongst others; and from

[1] It should be said that this reading is also supported in an old anti-Jewish *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* discovered by Mr. Conybeare in an eleventh century manuscript in the Vatican, and published by him in 1898.

Epiphanius, the acknowledged patristic authority on everything pertaining to heresies, we learn the remarkable fact that the early text of Matthew used by Cerinthus lacked this particular section. But if that is so, does not probability appear to favour the theory (1) that Matthew's Gospel, in its opening chapters, originally affirmed Jesus to be the Messiah, proving this by His descent from David through Joseph, who was stated to have been His real father; (2) that at a somewhat later stage, the verses i. 18—25 were inserted between chapter i. 17 and chapter ii. 1, which certainly link on naturally to each other; and (3) that then, this insertion having been made, chapter i. 16 was altered to correspond? Such, in our view, is the most probable solution of the problem, so far as Matthew's Gospel is concerned.

It remains for us to examine Luke's testimony to the virgin birth. We have already seen that the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript renders Luke ii. 5 "with Mary his *wife*," instead of "who was betrothed to him," which is scarcely an alteration likely to have been introduced by some later scribe. We have also seen that Luke's Gospel appears over and over again to attribute to Joseph the real paternity of our Lord. There remain, however, irreconcilable with all such indications of a purely human descent, verses 34 and 35 of the first chapter:

"And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God."

These verses certainly are emphatic and unambiguous enough; our vigilance is only aroused when we carefully read the whole passage, i. 26—38, going over it verse by verse. What is the situation portrayed? Mary, on the eve of marriage, receives a supernatural intimation that the Son she is to bear will be called to the throne of His ancestors, that He is to re-establish the old national monarchy on an enduring basis; in other words, she is to become the mother of the long-hoped-for Messiah. Such a promise is assuredly glorious and wonderful; but it does not prepare the ground for, or lead up to, Mary's question, "How shall this be?" In contemplating marriage, she must have contemplated motherhood, or at least have regarded it as a natural contingency. She is about to enter into wedlock; she is promised a Son, for whom a splendid future is predicted. Her inquiry, therefore, has no *raison d'être;* its sole purpose is to provide an opening for the declaration in the following verse. This will be still more clearly seen when we compare that declaration in turn with the angel's reference to Elisabeth in verse 36: to point to Mary's kinswoman with the words, "behold, she *also* hath conceived," would be beside the mark, for an impending natural birth cannot serve to confirm the promise of a supernatural one. On the other hand, the reference to the case of Elisabeth links on naturally to the promise made in verses 31—33, where Mary is told that she is to be the mother of the Messiah. The upshot of these reflections is that in Luke, as in Matthew, the original

intention was to present Jesus as the descendant, through Joseph, of David, and that His birth and destiny as the Messiah were foretold to Mary as she was about to be married to Joseph; that verses 34 and 35 represent a later interpolation, whose tenor runs altogether counter to the Evangelist's original conception of Joseph and Mary as the "parents," the "father and mother" (Luke ii. 33, 41, 48) of Jesus; and that the words "as was supposed" in the description of Jesus as "the son of Joseph" (*ibid.* iii. 23) are inserted with an obvious "harmonising" purpose.[1]

This view of Luke i. 34, 35, first propounded by Hillmann in 1891, and since accepted by a concourse of scholars including Harnack, Pfleiderer, Wernle, Schmiedel, Holtzmann and Usener, is here recommended, not because of the weight of the names which support it, but because of what seems its inherent reasonableness; because, in short, it explains facts which otherwise remain unexplained. It gives us a consistent picture of Him who, for all His future exaltation, passed through a normal infancy and boyhood, was "subject" to His parents, grew and waxed strong, advanced in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and men. Into this simple, human chronicle of physical,

[1] Could the conception which ascribes the paternity of our Lord to the Holy Spirit have grown up on Hebrew soil at all? The Hebrew term for "spirit"—*ruach*—is feminine; and it is noteworthy that in the apocryphal Gospel of the Hebrews Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as His *mother*.

mental, moral and spiritual development the stories of a supernatural birth do not fit; they are a foreign element, and their detachment from the setting into which they have been artificially inserted leaves us with an intelligible account of the earlier belief concerning the birth of Jesus Christ.

## V

Have we, then, it may be asked by the reader who has had the patience to follow the above discussion, arrived at merely negative results? If such a survey as we have conducted leads us to endorse the statement of one of the sanest of English religious thinkers, who writes, "The birth stories of Matthew and Luke fail to approve themselves as of authority,"[1] do we thereby pronounce these stories worthless? Above all, do we, in stating our grounds for believing that our Lord was in the simplest and fullest sense the Son of man, implicitly deny His claim to be the Son of God? The first of these questions requires only a brief answer, while the second must be dealt with at somewhat greater length.

Let us say, then, in the first instance, that the time has surely gone by when the discovery of the legendary character of a narrative which was once regarded as historical, meant that that narrative was to be ignominiously cast overboard, amid rejoicings that yet another falsehood had been victoriously exposed. The time has gone by when this rough-and-ready method of differentiation could pass for criticism. When we conclude, nowadays, that

[1] J. Brierley, *Our City of God*, p. 32.

a story is legendary, we have still to seek to understand what the legend means and how it arose. To trace the origin of the stories which we have been examining may be impossible, owing to the scantiness of the data at our disposal; we may receive a hint here and there, but that is all. Thus, no doubt, the faulty Greek translation of Isa. vii. 14, to which Matthew appeals, affords us some clue: if this prophecy was regarded as Messianic, and if Jesus was the Messiah, then it would be concluded that it *must* be true of Him! Again, it may be the case that the story of the adoration of the Magi was modelled by popular fancy upon the journey of the Parthian king Tiridates and his Magians from the East to Rome, where he worshipped the Emperor, departing into his own country by another way[1]; but such surmises, however plausible and interesting, can never rise to the level of certainties. On the other hand, taking these stories as a whole, and inquiring into their value as legends, we shall certainly be justified in assigning to them a very high significance and treating them as first-class material contributory to an estimate of Jesus Christ. As Harnack has pointed out in a famous passage, a great personality is to be understood not only by finding out his words and deeds, but especially by noting the impression he produced upon those who came under his influence. Harnack's observation applies very signally in the present instance. These stories embody, in picture language, precisely the same feeling about Jesus which

[1] Soltau, *Birth of Jesus Christ*, pp. 40, 72—75.

Paul expressed in speaking of Him as "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," and which the Fourth Evangelist expressed when he declared Him to be the Word made flesh. These are only various ways of stating the same truth: so high, so pure, so holy, of such unearthly grandeur and tenderness, did Jesus appear to those who confessed Him as Lord and Saviour, that they had in some way to mark their sense of His elevation above the common plane of humanity. Paul does not state it in the same terms as the Fourth Evangelist, nor the latter in the same terms as Matthew and Luke, who are more strongly influenced by the current Messianic ideas of their time; yet they one and all, each in his own dialect, put into words the same conviction, born of the same consciousness. As for the stories of the Lord's miraculous entry into the world, the true question we have to ask is this: *What must have been the elevation of a life to which such an origin was attributed?* As has been wisely and happily said by a recent writer concerning these narratives, which we would assuredly not miss from our Gospels, "they are trustworthy testimonies, not to the reality of certain incidents, but to the quality and magnitude of Jesus's character; not the history of His birth, but products of the quality of His ministry."

But do we not, in surrendering our Lord's miraculous conception, surrender also *de facto* that which makes Him the Son of God? Do not the virgin birth and the Incarnation logically stand and fall

together?[1] This view is still very widely held and advocated; it is particularly gratifying to find it energetically repudiated by Dr. Horton, who says: "The Divinity of Jesus does not rest on His physical origin. . . . If the Divinity of Jesus rested on it, we should indeed be in a perilous way."[2]

But if not on this physical miracle, on what does the Divinity of our Lord rest, or in what way is the Incarnation to be retained? We believe that as a matter of fact these great central truths are not only independent of the birth-stories, but that in and through the realisation of that independence they are coming to be held again to-day with an altogether new warmth and vividness. It cannot be too often reiterated that spiritual things are spiritually, not physically, discerned; that the flesh profiteth nothing is the direct statement of the Evangelist who, declining to tell either Matthew's or Luke's story, has yet of all others given us the Gospel of the Incarnation, the Good News of God in Christ. It is this idea, common to the Fourth Evangelist and to the great

[1] "That it is possible to believe in the Incarnation of our Lord on other grounds than the virgin birth I fully admit, although I believe that those who take this position are *in a most illogical and unsafe position.*" So, *e.g.*, Dr. George S. Barrett.

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 7, 9. Compare also the following: "Peter and Paul and John take the greatest care not to rest their Gospel upon it, or to allow their hearers to confuse the certainty of Christ's Divinity with so inscrutable a cause as the mode of His birth. The absolute silence of these greatest witnesses on the subject is the clearest guidance for putting the belief in the virgin birth in its right place." (Horton, *My Belief*, p. 145.)

apostle, upon which the thought of our own age is seizing hold with renewed intensity, as the culminating example and proof of the Divine Immanence. Without denying the Transcendence of God, but as complementary to the latter truth, we have really come to believe once more in the indwelling of God in the universe, and His self-revelation to us as so indwelling. On this great subject a few words at least must be said, showing how, step by step, the guiding thought of God's immanence brings us to the Divinity of Christ as its goal.

The doctrine which we are considering is that which declares that there is one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. If He is thus truly *in* the world, then natural law reveals the steadfastness and prevailing power of the Divine Will, while evolution reveals the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Purpose fulfilling itself in an age-long upward-reaching process—a fact which Aristotle apprehended when he said that nature seemed to be constantly striving after something better. But if God's immanence is universal, it is yet a phenomenon admitting of an infinite diversity of degrees; and as God is more fully revealed in the organic than the inorganic, in the conscious than the unconscious, so He is immeasurably more manifest in man than in the lower creatures. In declaring that "the Spirit of God dwelleth in man" we hold that He is present in man in the same sense in which there is something of a parent's very being in his children; that man is homogeneous with God, a partaker of the Divine nature. And as we see God

revealed in the physical universe as Will and Purpose, so in man's moral nature, and his inner satisfaction or dissatisfaction, according as he does or does not approach a certain moral standard, we discern Him as Righteousness; while, since men are *persons*, the God whose Spirit tabernacles in them must be at least *personal* also.

But even the knowledge of God as personal and righteous leaves us unsatisfied; the assurance which alone will content the awakened human spirit is that which tells him that God is Love, and that His truest name is Father. Such an assurance could be bestowed upon us only through the complete revelation of God's *character* on a finite scale, that is to say, through His indwelling in an unparalleled degree in a unique and ethically perfect Being; and such an event we conceive to have taken place in what is known pre-eminently as the Incarnation. This is the truth which is expressed in unsurpassable fashion in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son"; and while man was created in God's image, this Son is described as "the very image of His substance."

Let us formulate this truth as clearly as possible, in order to prevent all misunderstanding. The fullest, highest knowledge of God, that which we are most concerned to possess, which matters to us most deeply,

could not have come to us in any other way but through One in whom the Spirit dwelt without measure, in whom we saw Divinity, not as a fitful glimmer, but as a white and steady flame. This, indeed, we believe—agreeing therein with the unbroken conviction of the whole Christian Church—to be the very reason for Christ's coming, namely, to reveal God fully and perfectly to us. He that hath seen Him, hath seen the Father. We come to the Father through the Son, because there is no other way. We echo the unanimous verdict and experience of Christendom when we say that He hath shown us the Father, and it sufficeth us. We have seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The Incarnate Son is the supreme and crowning instance of the Divine Immanence.[1]

## VI

But at this point protests and questions arise which it would be foolish to ignore. Even the writer whom we have so frequently quoted in this chapter, and who urges

[1] This view, however, is strongly controverted by Dr. Forsyth, who says that the doctrine of Incarnation is one "which the young readily confuse with immanence," and that the immanence of God in human nature is "a mere philosopheme, absolutely fatal to a gospel, and welcome chiefly either to the half-taught, or to moral minors." (See "Immanence and Incarnation," in *The Old Faith and the New Theology*, pp. 49, 51.) With this sweeping dictum it is some consolation to compare the statement of so eminent a theologian as Prof. W. Adams Brown, quoted on p. 99, note.

that the "doctrine of the Immanence of God, the idea that God is in us all, leads us irresistibly to the conclusion that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,'" maintains that while "we are bound to affirm a Divinity in all men," yet "the Divinity in Christ is quite other than the Divinity in man as such."[1] Similarly, Dr. Adeney lays down the position that "the Divine in Christ" is "a different kind of union" from any which the Divine in us may constitute, because in Him "it is a union of personality and being and essence"; while we have had already occasion to quote Dr. Ballard's reference to "the gulf existing from everlasting to everlasting between Jesus Christ and any human soul." Although, *i.e.*, none of these theologians would presumably go the length of Dr. Gore, who holds that there must have been "something that was also physically and materially miraculous" in the fundamental structure of our Lord's manhood, they all agree that in His inmost essence there was that which amounts to a difference between Him and the race, not in degree, but in kind.

So far as this contention is based upon the sinlessness of the Saviour, its consideration must be postponed to the following chapter; here we can only say that such a difference in kind, such an impassable gulf between Jesus Christ and every other human soul, if it were established, would in our opinion destroy all the value Christ possesses for us as an example in whose steps

[1] Horton, *My Belief*, pp. 97, 109.

we were to follow. Only like can imitate like; where there is a radical, fundamental unlikeness, there the idea of following is *ipso facto* excluded. There may be an immeasurable distance between the interpretative power, the faultless style and marvellous technique of a great virtuoso, and the stumbling performance of a musical tyro; yet if the one may be held up as a model to the other, it is in consideration of a certain ultimate community of nature between them, without the existence of which there could be no stimulus given or received. And since, the moment we come to matters of practice fact must be taken to rule theory, we would submit that the mere fact that Christ has been and continues to be the greatest of all incentives to a godly, righteous and sober life, proves that with all the difference in degree between Him and ourselves, there must be a fundamental likeness in kind. To state this in the familiar form of a hypothetical syllogism, if Jesus were essentially unlike us, He could not be an object of imitation; but He is, as experience attests, an object of imitation; therefore He cannot be essentially unlike us.

But what, it will be asked, becomes of the unique claim involved in the saying, "I and the Father are one"? We need not stay to discuss the authenticity of these words; it is enough that we should inquire into their meaning. Is what is claimed in this statement—no matter whether by our Lord Himself or by the Fourth Evangelist on His behalf—"a union of personality and being and essence," in short, an *identity* with the Father

such as, of course, no mortal could claim without blasphemous presumption? We think that light is thrown upon this question by the use made of this idea of "oneness" where it occurs elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel. It seems to us that when the Evangelist represents our Lord as praying that His disciples "may be one, *even as we are*" (John xvii. 11; cp. xvii. 21), he not only does not refer to any possible or impossible *identity* taking the place of the disciples' separate individualities, but that he also explains in what sense the oneness subsisting between Himself and the Father is to be interpreted. In the light of this passage it becomes clear that the words "I and the Father are one" cannot refer to a fusion or "union of personality;" they state a unique claim to entire and unbroken harmony with God—a claim to have realised the ideal life of sonship by a continual doing of the Father's will, speaking the words, doing the works, which the Father has given Him to speak and to do. This saying expresses a glorious attainment, but it also utters a magnificent challenge to men to model themselves upon Christ's character, to live the same kind of life, so that where He is they may be also.

Are we then asserting, it will be asked, since we disclaim the idea of any difference in *kind*, that Jesus is Divine—that He is the Son of God—just as may be said of ourselves? That would be a very complete misunderstanding of the position we are trying to set forth, and perhaps an illustration may help to remove it.

Between a match, flickering for a few seconds, and a candle—an incandescent light—an arc lamp—the sun itself—there are an infinite number of gradations; and between the first and last there is a difference so great as to baffle expression: yet all these are essentially the same in the one respect, that all give *light*. Similarly, while there is an immeasurable distance between the broken and fitful gleams of goodness that may illumine a sin-darkened life and the almost superhuman goodness of a St. Francis or a Father Damien; whether it is the impulse which makes some poor outcast share his last penny with a brother outcast, or an unwonted access of unselfishness stirring in an egoist, or the instinct of self-sacrifice transfiguring the life of some worker in the slums: it is all *goodness*, the same in kind, however vast may be the difference in degree.

We think it strictly legitimate to say that just as there is only one kind of light, and only one kind of goodness, so there is and can be only one kind of Divinity—one Divine Spirit pervading and transcending the universe, the same above all, and through all, and in all.[1]

[1] We regard, that is to say, as unnecessary and misleading, the attempt to distinguish between immanence and incarnation, so far as the Divine indwelling in human souls is concerned. The incarnation of God in Christ is the supreme and illuminating instance of a universal fact, expressing in ideal perfection the truth about the relation between God and man; in Prof. W. Adams Brown's words, "The special incarnation in Christ requires as its complement the wider incarnation in humanity." (*Christian Theology in Outline*, p. 352.)

Of that Spirit there are manifestations innumerable, with myriads of differences as regards degree; all things and beings show it forth in the measure in which they are able to do so, and incomparably highest of all stands Jesus Christ. Seeing Him, we know that we stand in the presence of God's supreme Revealer and Revelation; we behold God manifest in the flesh, the Father shown forth in the Son. Not the omnipotence of God, nor the omniscience of God, least of all the omnipresence of God, but—as we remarked already—that which we most needed to know, the *character*, the Fatherhood of God, is what we learn from Him in whom the Spirit dwelt without measure.

All this, which is the essence of the Incarnation,[1] is quite independent of a supernatural birth; it does on the other hand involve a special relation, together with the consciousness of such a relation, between Jesus and God—an unparalleled closeness and intimacy, by reason of which He knew Himself to be not simply a son, but the Son of God. As has been well said by Mr. E. F. Scott, "the story of the Gospel is simply unintelligible without this primary assumption that Jesus was conscious of a unique relation between Himself and God. This consciousness, by its very nature, does not admit of analysis. It was given to Jesus immediately, like the sense of His own personality, and He does not say how it came to Him, or how He explained it to

[1] *Pace* Dr. Forsyth, who defines the Incarnation not as the Word made flesh, but as "a Christ made sin." See *loc. cit.*, p. 48.

Himself."[1] For confirmation of this view we need not turn to sayings ascribed to Jesus exclusively in the Fourth Gospel, and for that reason subject to doubt; if it is true that this consciousness pervades the whole picture of His life and teaching, we may also point out that it finds the most direct expression in a Synoptic utterance belonging to the pre-Marcan source "Q" (see p. 24) and admitted as authentic by the least conservative school of Continental critics.[2] We are of course referring to the great outburst recorded for us in Matt. xi. 27, and Luke x. 22: "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." These words furnish the clue which we must follow if we are to penetrate to the very core of the question of Christ's person.

It needs hardly to be said that such an utterance could only have fallen from the lips of One who had passed through the highest and most wonderful spiritual experiences, who had seen veil after veil between God and Himself fall down, until He stood in the immediate presence of the Most High, knowing that it was God's life that lived in Him, God's word that spoke through Him, realising that between Himself and God there was

[1] *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 181. The above reference, it should be noted, is to the use of the term "Son of God" in the Synoptics.

[2] See, *e.g.*, Johannes Weiss, *ad loc.*, in *Schriften des N. T.*, vol. i., pp. 320—323. Cp. Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus*, p. 135.

so close a kinship as made Him the well-beloved Son of a loving Father. The words express a solemn rejoicing in this unique communion, together with a sense of the immense responsibility which His exalted spiritual place lays upon Him—*viz.*, that of revealing God to the race; may we not also say that they express a certain sense of loneliness, the supreme isolation of supreme genius? Moving as a Man among men, He was yet perforce the Great Unknown; the multitudes who thronged around Him were not capable of fully understanding Him. He might bend down to their level; but could they rise to His? He might eat and drink with them; could they joy and sorrow with Him? Surveying the crowds which at times did not leave Him time so much as to take a meal—some of them drawn by curiosity, others in search of the latest sensation, some anxious to have their diseases healed, others to see the performance of such cures—He must have asked Himself: "Who out of all these really *knows* Me?" Who, indeed, could share the innermost thoughts and feelings of the Son of God? Not one—or rather, only One. God knew Him, and only the Father *could* know the Son. From the coldness, the unresponsiveness, even the well-meaning dulness of workaday humanity, Jesus was always able to retreat into the solitude which for Him was filled with the beatific presence of that One by whom He knew Himself understood. How often we read of Him thus withdrawing into wilderness or mountain to pray, to commune with God! After a day's toil and teaching,

intense activity, battle and travail, the Son of God escapes from the overmuch contact with man into the still cool night, to be alone; "and yet," as the Fourth Evangelist beautifully interprets the Master's mind for us—"and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." No one knoweth the Son, save the Father.

But if the earlier clause of this great declaration yields its meaning clearly enough, attesting our Lord's own sense of His unique spiritual status, the second part of the saying seems to arouse all our difficulties afresh: "neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." Does not such a statement imply that very unlikeness in kind the existence of which we had denied—is not the claim here made one to the exclusive possession of a faculty which is lacking in the rest of the race? And assuming this claim to have been put forward, can we admit it to be well founded? Instead of limiting the knowledge of God to Jesus, and condemning mankind to an agnosticism from which there is no escape except through Him, is it not more in accordance with fact to say that God hath at no time left Himself without a witness, even as He made of one every nation of men, that they should seek after Him who is not far from every one of us?

But these difficulties have their origin in a misapprehension, due in part at least to an inadequate rendering of the Greek text. While, of course, behind our Greek there stands the Aramaic out of which it was translated,

and at which we can only guess, the word rendered "knoweth" certainly bears a far more intense meaning, such as "knows fully" or "understands thoroughly." Between complete knowledge and blank ignorance there are as many shades as between noonday sun and midnight darkness. And moreover our saying does not speak of the knowledge of *God*, but of the knowledge of the *Father*. The faculty by which man seeks after and apprehends God is universal, in virtue—and we would add, only in virtue—of the universal indwelling of the Divine in man. God's existence had been revealed "by divers portions" to the children of Israel as well as to others for centuries before the advent of Christ; but to know Him as the almighty Creator, as the supreme Ruler, as the righteous Judge—or as the All in One, the One in All—is, as we have seen, not that knowledge in which man can ultimately acquiesce. And in spite of tentative foregleams of a fuller revelation, such as we receive in the pathetically tender words of a Hosea, it was reserved for Jesus to bring into the world a new conception, a new consciousness of God, which burst forth into one word, religion's ultimate—"Abba, Father!" Now, that which enables Jesus thus to "know" God completely, to interpret Godhead as Fatherhood, is the fact that He Himself is the Son: it was His own perfect filial disposition which gave to Him this particular and final knowledge of God in such manner that He not only saw the Father, but perfectly showed Him forth. The words, "neither doth any know

the Father, save the Son," so far from being a mystery, are seen on reflection to state an incontestable truth: who else *could* know Him or reveal Him?

But does not this still imply an endowment to which all other human beings are and must be strangers—is there not on this assumption "a great gulf fixed," impossible for us to cross? Again we demur; admitting what is, indeed, too unmistakable to be in doubt, *viz.*, the altogether unique insight of Jesus into the very heart of God, the unique closeness of His relation to the Father, we must still plead that a knowledge acquired through a capacity to which there corresponded nothing at all in us would be incommunicable. The possibility of revelation depends upon an ultimate similarity, and such revelation would be rendered impossible by an ultimate dissimilarity, between revealer and recipients; hence, since Jesus *de facto* does reveal the Father to us, there must be in us a capacity corresponding, in however dim and inchoate fashion, to His.

And that capacity which we share with Him, and which, slumbering in us, it is His function to awaken, is simply the capacity for sonship. It is because we are potentially sons that God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father. Jesus discovered and lived the life of perfect sonship which made God's perfect Fatherhood absolutely certain to Him; He tells us to live the same kind of life, in order that we may receive the same kind of knowledge. The Son "willeth" to reveal the Father to all who in turn

are willing to take His yoke upon themselves. He invited men to learn of Him, not because He wished to thrust His dominion upon the soul, but because He knew that it was indispensable for them to be taught of Him the secret of sonship, in order that there might disclose itself to them the greater secret of Fatherhood.

And thus we are at length able to state our conclusion; it is this: Jesus, who entered this world in the normal way; who passed through a normal childhood and youth; who was a stranger to no human emotion, who worked for His livelihood, shared men's joys and griefs, knew hunger and thirst and weariness, who agonised in Gethsemane, and tasted what it is for a man to die—He is indeed the Son of man; but none the less, nay all the more, is He, through whose mortal vesture the Spirit shone with undimmed splendour, the Son of God, the Light of the world, the Way, the Truth and the Life. For His own life of complete Sonship has not merely unveiled to us the truth about God, so that henceforth we know Him and have seen Him, but it has also revealed to us the truth about ourselves—the truth that we, too, are destined to live the filial life, and the way in which we may attain to it. And because it is Christ's Sonship that has made ours possible, because by His great radiance our smaller lights are kindled to responsive brightness, He is the Unique Son, and we become brothers and sisters to Him if we do the will of His Father (Mark iii. 35). It is He, and none other,

who makes God real to us; it is He, and none besides, who has for us the value of God. The knowledge of the Father is through Him: only the Son has it; only the Son has it to give.

The pathway of the soul to the innermost of God lies inevitably through the heart of Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### WAS HE SINLESS?

"*Truly, this man was the Son of God*"—thus, says tradition, exclaimed the rough Roman soldier who superintended the Crucifixion, when Jesus bowed His head and yielded up His spirit. Tradition may not speak with an altogether certain sound—the words have come down to us in more than one version, and no one could affirm with confidence which reading, Mark's or Luke's, was the historically accurate one; nevertheless, the form in which we are quoting the centurion's exclamation sums up in one telling phrase the tribute which the heart of man instinctively pays to Jesus Christ, as age after age men read the story, and feel the spell and power, of His life. As we study the Gospels, we carry away the impression of a character of incomparable grandeur and loveliness, of a life and death that compels our homage and admiration as does no other. We follow the Son of man as He goes about in His native Galilee from village to village, teaching and healing; we listen to the words of sublime tenderness and insight that fall from His lips, and confess that never man spake like this Man; we watch His fearlessness in the presence of wrong, His pity for the sinner, His sympathy with the sorrowful, His utter trust

in the Divine goodness, and feel that He taught a religion by being a Religion; we pass with Him through that last fateful week in Jerusalem, see Him taken prisoner on a false and malicious charge, mingle with the crowd before the governor's seat, and our heart echoes Pilate's words after he has examined the Accused, "I find no fault in this man"; we behold Him finally uplifted on the Cross, linger in that presence until the spirit quits its frail tenement, and the centurion's testimony to the sublime Victim is spoken out of our very soul. Yes, He was indeed, as Jean Paul expressed it, "the Holiest among the mighty and the Mightiest among the holy"; gazing upon His matchless splendour and purity of thought and life, we feel that here God has come closer to the race than either before or since, and that, having seen Him, we have seen the Father.

And yet, when we have confessed all this, we have not yet answered the question which heads this chapter; we have not yet declared our belief in the sinlessness of our Lord in the sense in which that doctrine is generally affirmed—or perhaps it would be better to say, in the sense in which that *fact* is affirmed as a *doctrine.* The subject is one in regard to which there exists an unusual amount of confusion; and that confusion shows itself nowhere more than in the manner in which some of those who seek most passionately to prove what is in the first instance a historical statement, allow their judgment to be swayed by their real desire, which is to vindicate the soundness of an integral part of their doctrinal system.

We shall seek to avoid the pitfalls with which the ground is strewn by distinguishing between three attitudes in which this problem may be approached, *viz.*, (1) the dogmatic, (2) the agnostic, and (3) the critical.

## I

The dogmatic attitude, the dogmatic affirmation of the sinlessness of Jesus, is, of course, that which has been, and still remains, the most widely prevalent. "It is so, because it must be so." It cannot be too clearly understood—though, as a matter of fact, it is generally forgotten, sometimes even by those who argue from that particular standpoint—that the sinlessness which is so asserted is not equivalent to freedom from *actual* sin, but freedom from the *liability* to sin; this point has to be firmly grasped before we can profitably proceed a single step further. A logical orthodoxy requires a supernaturally sinless Christ; His sinlessness is a postulate, rendered necessary on the one hand by the doctrine of the Fall, with the consequences which that catastrophe entailed, and on the other by the doctrine of substitutionary Atonement; the results of the first could not be otherwise effectively counteracted, nor the object of the second effectively attained. The Saviour had to be sinless in a miraculous sense, and this soteriological requirement necessitated in turn that He should be miraculously conceived and born.

We shall deal more fully with these propositions in a moment, showing the close connection between the

doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus on the one hand, and those of the Fall, the vicarious Atonement and the virgin birth on the other; in the meantime it may be interesting to glance at a specimen of the style of reasoning by which theologians have tried to prove the dogma under discussion. We go to a work which is still regarded and quoted as a classic on this subject, Ullmann's *Sinlessness of Jesus*, and find the following put forward:

"Wherever Christianity exists, there holiness also is to be seen. While exceptionally advanced holiness may be of rare occurrence in any society, there is not a country, or even a town or village, in which Christianity is established, but there will be found in it numbers of persons striving after a holy life. In every Christian congregation there are at least a few specimens of character so striking that even those who are themselves destitute of religious aspiration acknowledge them to be no earthly products, but to have a heavenly origin; while more sympathetic observers will say that to them the sight of one such holy person has been a more convincing argument for the reality and the blessedness of religious experience than all the verbal arguments they have ever listened to. For this phenomenon is specifically Christian. . . . Those who are possessed of it [*viz.*, of holiness] would acknowledge that they owe it to Christ, their communion with God being based on the sense of reconciliation through Christ, and their benevolence towards men due to their adoption of His views as to the dignity and destiny of human nature. They are imitators of Him, yet they always know Him to be infinitely above them. Here, then, is the argument: 'If Christ is the source of holiness in others, and if He stands far above the holiest of those who derive it from Him, it is a reasonable inference that He must Himself be sinless.'"

With great respect we are bound to say that nowhere but in theology would an eminent thinker and scholar

advance such reasonings as adequate or convincing. Is it a fact that "in every Christian congregation there are at least a few specimens of character so striking that even those who are themselves destitute of religious aspirations acknowledge them to be no earthly products, but to have a heavenly origin"? Scepticism would have long since vanished if it were so. But, granting the facts to be as stated, the inference drawn from them would still be hazardous in the extreme; one might reasonably say that He who inspired holiness in others must Himself have been superlatively holy, but even superlative holiness is not yet synonymous with sinlessness.

If arguments of so precarious a character could be judged satisfactory by minds ordinarily acute, the explanation of such a circumstance can only be sought in an unconscious dogmatic bias, inclining men to accept on very slender evidence what they already desired to accept, and to hail as sufficient evidence whatever enabled them to fortify themselves in a position which commended itself to them on *a priori* grounds. We have already briefly indicated what these were, and return to this part of our subject forthwith, *viz.*, the doctrinal grounds on which the sinlessness of Jesus has been held and defended with such particular and even passionate vigour.

Undoubtedly, the first necessity for this doctrine lies in that of the Fall, and the far-reaching inference drawn from this by the apostle Paul, *i.e.*, the total depravity of the human race. In the Pauline system man is "by nature" a child of wrath, his constitution having suffered

such corruption at its core as makes him inevitably God's enemy, and hence the object of Divine disfavour. The Law, with its offer of righteousness by obedience to its injunctions, was in Paul's eyes a snare and delusion, nay, the strength of sin; men could not obtain salvation along those lines. "By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight. . . . But now apart from the Law a righteousness from God hath been manifested . . . even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe" (Rom. iii. 20—22). To such believers their sins will not be reckoned, Christ having borne the burden of their transgressions on the Cross. But how could Christ's sufferings and death effect so much? The answer is given in the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of substitution, 2 Cor. v. 21: "Him who knew no sin He made sin on our behalf: that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." If through the obedience of the One the many can be made righteous (Rom. v. 19), it is because "the One" knew no sin: only the infinite sinlessness of One could be accepted as the equivalent of the infinite sinfulness of creation, or avail to extinguish the debt incurred by the whole race.

But how, it would next be asked, could such a condition be fulfilled—how could there be a sinless Being apart from a supernatural origin, seeing that all Adam's offspring were born with the taint of inherited corruption in their natures? The problem seemed to receive its solution in the light of the doctrine of the virgin

birth[1]; the son of God, not of Adam, was as such exempt from that evil heritage, and this supernatural immunity fitted Him to perform the supernatural task of offering His stainless purity as sufficient to outbalance a whole world's sin. Once grant the presuppositions on which this scheme rests, and the remainder follows with at least an appearance of cogency that is far from being unimpressive.

But do we grant these presuppositions? Quite apart from accepting in its literal meaning, as Paul intended it to be accepted, his view of man's "fallen" nature (Rom. iii. 10—18), does the fact of sin require to be accounted for by the assumption that "at some distant period of our history as a race—perhaps at the very beginning—a wrong turn was taken, and its consequences passed on through the mysterious law of heredity, continuous to this day"?[2] We submit that this theory of "some moral disaster or calamity that has fallen upon" human nature is quite gratuitous, as well as psychologically unsound. If man was to be endowed with moral freedom, that endowment, in order to be in any sense real, implied the possibility of wrongful choice, *i.e.*, of sin; the phenomenon of sin, therefore, sad and perplexing as it is in all other respects, is sufficiently explained as to its origin by the fact of man's freedom, without

[1] It is instructive to observe the analogous connection between the assumed sinlessness of Gautama and his supposed supernatural birth, without an earthly father. Cp. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 182. The inference, however, was apparently not drawn by the apostle himself; *v.s.*, p. 70.

[2] Griffith-Jones, *Faith and Verification*, p. 115.

any necessity for an original catastrophe in the shape of a Fall to account for its existence and persistence.

Nor does this hypothesis commend itself any better on moral than on psychological grounds; indeed, it forms part and parcel of a theory of sin which seems to us open to serious objections. The key-word of that theory, the familiar term "original sin," is in our view neither more nor less than a contradiction in terms, indicative of an entire confusion between two totally different things—the *disposition* to act in a certain manner and the *action* itself. Sin is what it is because it is willed, determined upon and assented to, by the doer; but no one can inherit an act, or be held guilty of what he has not done. Where a hereditary predisposition to evil exists, it forms an extenuating circumstance; and if it were indeed true that we are all "sold under sin," so much so that we could not do right, however much we desired to do so, we might with perfect justice appeal to the uttermost leniency of God in dealing with a misfortune for which we were not responsible. Certainly, it would be the height of injustice for Him to vent His anger upon us if the circumstances were as described, and to punish us for acting as our heredity compelled us to act. It were calamity enough to start the race hopelessly handicapped; to be, in addition, visited by the wrath of Him who ordained it so from before the foundations of the world would crown intolerable hardship by more intolerable irrationality.

Dismissing, then, the idea of a historical "Fall," and

rejecting the theories of original sin and total depravity, we have not the same *a priori* motives as those who hold these views for postulating that Jesus, in order to take away the sins of the world, must have enjoyed a supernatural immunity from the alleged taint inherent in the descendants of our first parents. Those who regard the whole of humanity as naturally incapable of rising, may have to assume at the opposite end a Jesus supernaturally incapable of falling ; but with the first of these assumptions, the necessity for the second disappears. This is not the place for discussing the doctrine of substitution, which, as we have seen, is not unconnected with that of our Lord's sinlessness ; for the moment we are merely concerned to point out that as a means of securing and guaranteeing this sinlessness the virgin birth simply fails. We could understand the general assertion that, if our Lord was of human descent, He could not be exempt from the universal human proneness to sin ; we do not at all understand those who proceed to argue that, if He was descended from one sinful human parent instead of from two, that proneness was thereby overcome. On the one hand, proclivities of every kind are demonstrably as much transmissible through one parent as through the other—even if we do not have to go further, and to point out that according to the common belief the Saviour's *body* was exclusively derived from His mother, the body being generally regarded as the irrational, passionate, lower part of man; on the other hand, if Deity could endow Jesus with a perfectly sinless nature notwith-

standing descent from one human—and *ex hypothesi* sin-tainted—parent, it is not quite obvious why the same endowment could not have been conferred upon Him notwithstanding His descent from two. To say, as has been said, that "we know too little of the way in which the soul is transmitted to be sure of this"—*viz.*, that a sinful nature might be handed down through a human mother—savours too much of an attempt to seek escape from a difficulty; we know, at any rate, that moral flaws can be transmitted from the mother's as surely as from the father's side. "When we lay the stress on such a physical fact, logic drives us along the course which the Roman Church has taken: if He was to be sinless, then, not only must He be without a human father, but His human mother must be immaculately conceived, and practically Divine; and then Mary's mother Anna must enjoy a similar immunity, and so back to Eve. The Roman logic has the advantage of showing the intrinsic fallacy of the whole argument." [1]

But if a miraculous birth from one human parent affords no guarantee of sinlessness—in the sense of

[1] Horton, *Devotional Commentary on St. Matthew*, p. 9. What really seems to be in the mind of those writers who hold a human maternity to be compatible with sinlessness, provided that maternity is "immaculate," is that human paternity, or rather parentage, must be attended by sin, and hence the occasion of sin's transmission. So far as this view is concerned, the logical honours rest with the Roman Church, which believes in the superior sanctity of celibacy, and, so believing, enforces it on her priests and those vowed to the "religious" life; in Protestantism, on the other hand, such a theory has no *locus standi*.

exemption from all disposition towards wrongful choice, or, for the matter of that, in any other—such an exemption, were it proved that our Lord enjoyed it, would at one stroke deprive His character of all moral complexion, and His life of all moral value for us. Indeed, "sinlessness" is an almost misleading term as applied to a being incapable of sin. "Such a being," it has been justly observed, "artistically perfect, would be morally less perfect than many a sinner who hates sin and resists, yet only imperfectly overcomes. We feel it at once impertinent to say that God is sinless. A perfect being cannot be sinless because there are in him no elements which make sin a possibility. Only the being who has in him the elements of a lower life, as well as the potentiality of a higher, is capable of sin; *only such can be sinless.*"[1] A Christ incapable of sin may be necessary to the symmetry of a certain kind of theological system; but He would be quite useless as an inspiration or moral example. Of two men, one who had been brought up in a cultured, refined Christian home, in surroundings of material prosperity, with all temptations to evil so far as possible eliminated, will in all probability turn out a more satisfactory citizen than some poor neglected child of the slums; but to hold the former up as a model to the latter would be ludicrously unjust. If the wrongful impulse which proves well-nigh irresistible to the second does not so much as exist for the first, such a product of happier conditions may be

[1] Beeby, *Doctrinal Significance of a Miraculous Birth, loc. cit.*

envied for being spared that particular struggle; but if he presumes on his superiority, he ought to be reminded that he has not been tempted in all points like his less favoured brother. In precisely the same way, it must be yet once more emphasised, if Jesus was supernaturally free from all liability to sin—if He could not be touched with a feeling of our infirmities—then, whatever else He might be, He could not be our example. If His nature was so unlike ours that He had, and could have, no personal experience of any of the besetments we know of, then it would be as futile to tell us to follow in His steps as it would be to tell a man on foot to follow an express train in its course, or an eagle in his flight. We arrive again at the conclusion to which we came in our previous chapter: If there was an "impassable gulf" between Jesus and ourselves—if He was so constituted that He *could* not sin—then He is not a possible object of imitation; and since He is held up as such an object, since we are even promised the possibility of attaining "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," the dogmatic postulate which we have been examining is seen to be untenable.

## II

The dogmatic attitude towards the question of our Lord's sinlessness was, as we saw, prompted by antecedent beliefs and doctrinal motives which do not weigh with us; when we turn from the dogmatic to the agnostic attitude, we are dealing with something which,

like everything pertaining to agnosticism, possesses a certain undeniable plausibility. Wearied by confident asseverations which, when more closely examined, resolve themselves into "I think it so because I think it so," one is apt in the end to be attracted by a confession of honest ignorance: "You affirm that Jesus was sinless; we do not affirm, because we do not know. How do *you* know?" Those who take up this position point out that the Gospels do not give, nor pretend to give, anything like complete biographies of our Lord. They are records, and very fragmentary records, of the closing year of His life—or, if of the last three years instead of one, so much the more fragmentary, the less continuous. Of the thirty years which preceded the public ministry of Jesus, our knowledge is practically *nil;* there is, with the exception of the birth narratives—which, even if true, do not assist us in this connection—nothing save the incident of His remaining behind in the Temple when a boy, engrossed in eager conversation with the scribes, and forgetful of everything else. Who can say, then, considering that we have no information to speak of concerning all this period, what may or may not have happened during it? And is it not wiser to forbear from making assertions which we are unable to substantiate?

The case for the scantiness of our knowledge concerning Jesus has been put with great force by Dr. Martineau:

"The Synoptists deal with the events of fifteen months, of which more than fourteen are assigned to Galilee; and the whole are supposed to have been spent by them, or their informants, in

attendance upon the steps of Jesus. But we hardly realise to ourselves how little of this story is really told. Of the four hundred and fifty days comprised within it, there are notices of no more than about thirty-five; while whole months together—now three, now two—are dropped in total silence. The Evangelists, when they speak, know how to recite with sufficient fulness. The day in the cornfield (Matt. xii. 1—xiii. 52) occupies one-tenth of Matthew's history of Christ's ministry; the day of the Sermon on the Mount, one-eighth (v. 1—viii. 17); a day in the Temple, nearly one-fifth (xxi. 18—xxvi. 2). The day of the blighted fig-tree occupies more than one-seventh of Mark's Gospel (xi. 20—xiii. 37). And five days claim in Luke (xx. 1 to the end) more than one-fourth of his narrative (excluding the legends of the birth and infancy). It appears, therefore, that *twelve-thirteenths* of the ministry which they describe is left without a record, and that the three Gospels move within the limits of the remaining one-thirteenth. . . . The vast amount of blank spaces in which they all [*i.e.*, the Synoptists] have to acquiesce betrays a time when the sources of knowledge were irrecoverably gone; and their large agreement in what remains, that they were only knitting up into tissues, slightly varied, the scanty materials which came almost alike to all."[1]

If we had to rest in such a statement, we should have to confess ourselves poor indeed as regards any knowledge of Christ, and any affirmation of His sinlessness would be *a fortiori* excluded. We venture, however, to think that Dr. Martineau's extreme estimate is at fault. Incidentally, indeed, we may express our wonder how, if there was a time when the sources of knowledge concerning Jesus were "irrecoverably gone," the Evangelists obtained such items of information as form the contents of our Gospels; but on the larger question under discussion we may turn to a passage of singular

[1] *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 185, 4th ed.

insight in which the same great thinker has refuted in advance the conclusion which seems to flow from the paragraph quoted above :

"That time is no measure of value in the deeper concerns of our humanity, is apparent from a comparison, not only of different persons, but even of different parts of our own individual experience. No hour-glass, no diary, can estimate for you the 'fulness of time'; it is the soul that fills it: if the soul lie asleep, it is not filled at all; if she be awake, in the vigils of suspense, of sorrow, of aspiration, there may be more in an hour than you can find in a dozen empty lives. . . Still more marked are the nodal points of our spiritual history. . . The magnitude of these moments, their real proportion to the whole story of our days, no dial-plate can show. The pendulum may beat but once, ere all be over; yet that instant may carry in it the burden of years. For the higher regions of our nature the true measures of time are found, not, as with physical changes, in any ratio of traversed area, but in the relation of events to our affections ; and in a focus, which is only a point, may burn a light of the spirit greater than you can find diluted through indefinite wastes of dull and hazy life."[1]

The bearing of these words upon our problem is sufficiently obvious ; if they are true, then the fragmentariness of our Gospel records need in nowise disconcert us, or cause us to feel that we know very little about Jesus. For if those records contain anything, they give us just those "nodal points" in our Lord's spiritual history ; they inform us concerning those moments in His life and experience which tell us more of what is essential than any faithful diary, with never a day's tale

[1] "Time to Nature, God, and the Soul," in *Hours of Thought*, vol. i., pp. 212—215.

omitted, could do: their incompleteness, in effect, is only quantitative, while the quality of the life is set forth so clearly, so convincingly, so triumphantly, that it is no exaggeration to say that there are few characters in history of whom we have anything like so intimate a knowledge. It really does not matter that whole months together are missing in the chronicle; there may have been more parables than ever found their way into the Gospels, more healings, more encounters with the representatives of a formal and external religion, but these additions could not have altered in any essential the features of the picture we already possess. We know what manner of Man Jesus was, as surely as we could have learnt it from any detailed biography; to say that we cannot pronounce a valid opinion concerning His character, in the absence of fuller information, is to plead an imaginary disadvantage. If our men of science can reconstruct the complete skeleton of an extinct species from a single bone, how much more do the materials we possess concerning Jesus Christ enable us to fill in the blanks!

Nevertheless, while we regard this refusal to pronounce upon the problem before us as based on a mistaken idea of the standard by which judgment should be governed, we think it is unfortunate to sum up the case, as a recent writer on the subject does, by saying that "a 'don't know' attitude really means a negative attitude." This is precisely the kind of statement which would drive some who sincerely profess ignorance upon the question of Christ's sinlessness into something nearer

negation. Such an attempt to force an affirmative verdict from a hesitating mind by representing the only alternative to be a blank denial is sometimes the reverse of successful: if it *must* be one or the other, such a one may retort, Then let it be the other! But though it is true of any affirmation that it can only be either true or untrue, it is not necessarily the fact that we are in a position to declare positively that it is, or is not, true. To contend that "the man who says of Jesus, 'I don't know whether He was a sinner,' will end in giving up His sinlessness," is as if one were to maintain that the man who says "I don't know whether Mars is inhabited," will in the end declare that it is not. The very fact of the slight historical evidence on which some have affirmed this particular fact—not as a fact merely, but as an article of faith—has caused others to adopt what we may think an excessive caution: but there is such a thing as an *adulta suspensio arbitrii*, and those who honestly, though we might think mistakenly, consider a certain contention to be "not proven," ought not to be provoked into outright denial by expressions such as we have just quoted.

III

If, however, we have come to the conclusion that the agnostic attitude—that which declares that we have no sufficient data for answering the question before us one way or the other—is as little tenable as the dogmatic one, there remains only that which is prepared once more to investigate the facts of the case, and to see whether they

warrant us in coming to any definite decision. This is the critical attitude, and its method is the critical method.

For the purpose we have in view we shall not appeal to any statements outside the Synoptic Gospels, which convey to us the most direct impression of Jesus, and the one least coloured by doctrinal prepossessions. When, *e.g.*, in a passage already quoted, Paul states that Jesus "knew no sin," the context shows that the apostle's doctrine required such a supernaturally immune Person, who alone could be the Redeemer of a sinful world. While He was "born of the seed of David according to the flesh," there was, in the apostle's view, a unique quality inherent in the spirit of Jesus, "a holy energy which excluded from the first that sinful predominance of the flesh, which is in all other men the basis of sinfulness."[1] Profoundly interesting as this Pauline theory is, and though, according to the authority just quoted, it "excludes even the Synoptic tradition of a fatherless generation and virgin birth," it is in the nature of theological speculation rather than of historical evidence, and hence does not fall within the scope of our survey.

In the Fourth Gospel, again, we have more than one statement which affirms the sinlessness of Christ, now in the form of a challenging question, now in that of a direct declaration: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" —*viz.*, to Him that sent Me. "The prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me." But this "self-

[1] Beyschlag, *New Testament Theology*, vol. ii., p. 69.

witness" of Jesus has avowedly no parallels of equal force in the earlier Gospels, and on more than one ground its historicity is questionable. Not only do we look with legitimate diffidence upon statements which are peculiar to the Fourth Gospel, especially if they are of a doctrinal character, but there is that about this reiterated assertion of the Johannine Christ's which is capable of producing an effect quite contrary to the one designed: "Moses wist not that his face shone"—a somewhat pronounced claim to moral eminence is not the most convincing proof of its validity.

Is it possible for us to divest ourselves of all preconceived notions, and simply to let the Synoptic Gospels speak to us? At any rate we must make the attempt. We have already admitted that these documents are not by any means complete records even of the period with which they deal; let us further recall the admission made in our introductory chapter, that the Evangelists were neither critical historians nor dispassionate chroniclers, but loving enthusiasts: yet, is it not remarkable that all through their accounts we should look in vain for any action being ascribed to Jesus which could be called a sin? It may be retorted that the writers of such a work as the Gospels, with the obvious design of glorifying a beloved Teacher and Leader, would quite naturally and of set purpose omit any feature that did not tend to their Master's exaltation; that nothing is more common than biographies which plainly show the purpose of the authors to present an idealised picture of their heroes.

Such a retort overlooks, however, the obvious fact that a biography written in any such spirit always betrays its object; we can always detect that it does not ring true to actual life—its omissions are almost patent. On the other hand, we cannot read our Synoptic Gospels without being impressed with the very slight degree of subjectivity displayed by the Evangelists, considering the circumstances under which they wrote. They are not infallible; they may strike us as being easily persuaded where we should require far stronger evidence to satisfy us; they are capable of making blunders; their recitals bear the stamp of their mental habits and the outlook of their age and country; but they are honest men, and nothing is further from them than to retouch the portrait they paint, with conscious intent to deceive. Their style is unstudied, direct, anything but elaborate; yet here is the significant fact, that the Synoptists, with none of the literary art or theological aim of the Fourth Evangelist, in setting forth the materials they had gathered together produce a picture which we may scan feature by feature, discovering nothing but what is fair and inspiring, a picture wholly unique and yet wholly human, free from every trace of artificiality or affectation. There is nothing stilted or unreal about the acts, the words, the gestures of the Man who moves through these pages; the Evangelists give us no more than an outline sketch, but it is unmistakably drawn from life.

Let a single particular attest the truth of this assertion. The portrait of Jesus which the Synoptists

present to us, while exhibiting the purest goodness and tenderness, is singularly free from any touch of that sentimentality which is one of the commonest counterfeits of these qualities. The Jesus of many popular hymns and much popular art is a slightly ineffective, even a slightly effeminate, figure ; but the Jesus of the Synoptics is a Man—resolute, bold, determined, keen and eager in debate, terrible in His wrath against wrong-doing, unsparing in His denunciation of hypocrites. There was nothing tepid, nothing phantasmal about Him ; with all His sublime graciousness and soul-subduing love, He stood with feet firmly planted upon the ground, a son of the soil, a Divine Realist, in nowise removed from the activities of ordinary men. But of one thing we find no hint or trace in the record ; that one thing is sin.

Or when on one occasion Mark tells us a story which gives us pause, alleging that Jesus cursed a fig-tree for not bearing fruit out of due season, we know at once that the Evangelist has blundered : that Jesus, as we know Him from all the rest of the Gospels, was capable of intense indignation, but not of childish petulance ; and we conclude that Mark, or Mark's informant, had misunderstood the parable of the barren fig-tree which we find in Luke xiii. 6—9, and told it with a "twist," as an incident which actually happened.[1] And it is

[1] "Parabolic symbolism is so slightly concealed under the narrative features of this story that the majority of critics are disposed to regard it as a mere endowment of the Lucan parable of the barren fig tree with concrete form, just as the parable of

because the story strikes us as altogether out of keeping with all we know of the Master's character, that we immediately suspect and finally dismiss it, as we should do a floating rumour imputing questionable conduct to a man of tried and sterling integrity.

## IV

But are there not, it will be urged, certain incidents in the Synoptics which, without attributing actual sinfulness to Jesus, seem implicitly to exclude the contrary? These incidents are the following—(1) the Baptism, (2) the Temptation, (3) the refusal to be called "good"; on each of them a word has accordingly to be said.

(1) "John came, who baptised in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptised of John in the Jordan" (Mark i. 4, 9). Here the inference, at first sight, seems obvious: if Jesus underwent the baptism of repentance, He must have had whereof to repent. To say that He "felt so keen a sympathy with His fellow-men that, as one with an unclean race, He judged Baptism to be appropriate" (Dods),—that He was, in effect, baptised, just as He was crucified, vicariously—has the appearance of being an explanation made to order, and introduces a

the Good Samaritan, and others, were long treated as instances of historical fact." (Prof. B. W. Bacon, *s.v.* "fig-tree" in Hastings's *Dict. of Christ and the Gospels*.) Compare, for another instance of the disciples' misunderstanding of our Lord's figurative language, Matt. xvi. 6, ff.

touch of unreality into the very opening scene of our Lord's public career; such a theory is quite obviously in the nature of an afterthought, imported into the narrative rather than legitimately deducible from it. We have, it is true, seen that this incident was felt to present difficulties from a very early time onward; Matthew is conscious of an element of incongruity in the transaction, and makes John exclaim deprecatingly, "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" while the Fourth Evangelist contrives to omit the baptismal act altogether, doubtless from the same motive as Matthew, but judging even Matthew's explanation to be inadequate. How could the Saviour of the world submit to a rite which amounted to a confession of sin?

But the apparent cogency of this reasoning disappears the moment we turn from the conventional connotation of the term "repentance," and go more carefully into the meaning of the word so rendered in our English version. Literally, the Baptist's call signifies "Be of another mind," or "Change your purpose"; no doubt, to address such an invitation to ordinary men was equivalent to asking them to repent, but that meaning, though the common one, is only secondary. Baptism was the symbol of a determination to make a fresh start, to live a new life, an act of public self-consecration, marking the beginning of a new epoch; was it, then, anything but natural that our Lord, when He had finally resolved to start upon the great enterprise of His ministry, adopted

this solemn rite, without thereby in the least confessing past sins or seeking purification? Into His existence, too, a new and powerful purpose had entered, changing its current from the quiet activities of the home, the workshop, the familiar village, to a career of strain and stress, conflict and danger. He would have to face the disapproval of His nearest, the opposition of the orthodox, the sneers of the respectable; and so He emphasises a momentous step by the simple, yet impressive ceremony which symbolised a dying to the old and a rebirth into a new life. To read a repentance for sins into our Lord's baptism at the hands of John is to miss the significance of the event.

(2) When we come to the Temptation, however, there is no doubt that a real difficulty arises, from the point of view of the common doctrinal formulation of Christ's sinlessness. We are not at present concerned to discuss the question whether the narratives of the Temptation in our Synoptic Gospels are to be regarded as recording outward events, or as symbols or allegories of a great moral and spiritual conflict which Jesus had to fight before taking up His ministry. Mark contents himself with recording the event with the utmost brevity, while in Matthew and Luke there is considerable elaboration; the Fourth Evangelist dismisses the episode altogether, as one which he feels to be unsuited to his presentation of Christ. If we must account for the origin of the story, we may surmise that our Lord followed the example of the prophets (compare, *e.g.*, Isa. vi. and Ezek.

xxxvii.) in dramatising an intense inner experience. So cautious a scholar as Professor Sanday has no hesitation in declaring that "the narratives of the Temptation are upon the face of them symbolical,"[1] while Dr. Marcus Dods concurs with this view in stating that "the more clearly the reality of the Temptation is grasped, the less need does there seem for supposing that the tempter took a visible shape, or that any bodily transport to 'the high mountain' or 'the wing of the temple' took place."[2]

The historical or symbolical nature of the narrative, however, is a minor consideration; the main fact is that He was tempted, and the main—and, indeed, the inevitable—inference is that there could be no susceptibility to temptation without the possibility of defeat. But such a possibility is irreconcilable with the doctrine of sinlessness as generally held. Unless the conflict of Jesus with evil was real, unless He felt conscious of its power, and had to repulse it by the exercise of His strength, the Temptation loses all its meaning—nay, the term itself becomes a misnomer. Temptations exist only for those who are capable of yielding to them; that which it costs us nothing to refuse, cannot be said to "tempt" us at all. Was, then, as Schleiermacher was driven to assume, the Lord's temptation simply something phantasmal, without either reality or intelligible purpose? The Fourth Evangelist, as we just said, has the courage of his convictions; such a One as the Christ

[1] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 43.

[2] Hastings's *Dict. of Christ*, *s.v.* "Temptation."

whom he describes could not be subjected to temptation —then why relate such an incongruous and, from his point of view, unedifying episode? We repeat that if the struggle was a real one, then there was always the *possibility* of an untoward issue; if, on the other hand, the result was predetermined, then we are merely dealing with an acted incident, possessing neither ostensible meaning nor moral value.

"However the enigma is to be solved," says Professor Stalker, "certain it is that Jesus was tempted." But is there, we may ask, a real enigma—or rather, is the enigma in the facts related by the Synoptists, or in the commonly-accepted doctrine of sinlessness? We conclude that the fault lies with the latter—that the enigma has been artificially created by an artificial construction of Christ's freedom from sin, a construction arrived at in obedience to doctrinal prepossessions, and not to be reconciled with fact. If Christ was constitutionally immune against sin, free from the possibility of succumbing to moral evil, then He could not be tempted; if, on the other hand, He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," then *His sinlessness was not*, as it is commonly understood, *an inability to fall, but an ability to resist and triumph.* This, and this alone, is the sinlessness we can predicate of Him; but it is not an attribute such as would either be conferred by a birth involving no participation in Adam's taint, or as would qualify Him to bear and "take away the sins of the world" as its sufficient Substitute.

If Christ's struggle with evil was a real experience—if He was "without sin," not because He had no difficulties to conquer, but because He always conquered them—the moral bearing of such a fact is obvious. Mere incapacity to yield to wrong would be, as has been seen, a miraculous but strictly non-moral endowment, involving no merit whatever; it is otherwise if we think of our Lord as One who was spared no pang or obstacle, but who resolutely faced His obstacles, and courageously surmounted them. If that is the true view of the matter, then it is one which is full of comfort and help for His followers, who are called to wrestle with sin and to overthrow it, as their Master did before them: "for in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

Our prime concern in the present place is simply to show that the reality of the temptation of Jesus is not incompatible with the reality of His sinlessness; at the same time we have now arrived at what seems a reasonable, as distinct from the dogmatic, interpretation of such an attribute, *i.e.*—to say it once more—not as inability to sin, but as ability to abstain from sinning.

(3) We turn lastly to the answer given by Jesus to the rich young ruler, when the latter greets Him with the phrase "Good Master," a salutation which He declines with the words, "Why callest thou Me good? none is good save one, even God." Is not this an implicit disclaimer of sinlessness, to say the least? Luke reproduces question and answer practically verbatim as given

in Mark; but Matthew, though he uses the same source, is undoubtedly conscious of a sense of embarrassment, and recasts both the young ruler's query and the Master's reply, making both turn upon some particular "good thing," the doing of which will ensure eternal life. That Mark's text represents the original version, and Matthew's an attempt at emendation, admits of no doubt; the rejoinder in Matthew, "Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good," betrays a modifying hand, and the motive underlying the modification is equally apparent.

But do the words which Mark and Luke ascribe to Jesus amount to an admission of sin on His part? We are again prepared to admit that they are not to be reconciled with a dogmatic assertion of *impeccability*, but hold that they are quite reconcilable with sinlessness. "The point," says Beyschlag, "is the concept 'good,' with which the young man is so indiscriminately lavish. Jesus means to say that in the highest, absolute sense it applies to God alone. In contrast with God, even the good are wicked. He Himself has nothing of the nature of evil to confess, yet even He is still subject to a moral development, and is still exposed to temptation. But God alone is good, according to His nature. It is His nature to be good, so that He in no sense needs first to become perfectly good by the conquering of any assailing evil."[1] In gently declining what may have struck Him as too glib a compliment, Jesus avows no failure,

[1] *Op. cit.*, vol. i., p. 83.

no defeat in the battle against evil; He is merely conscious that He has still to fight His battle—He sees the unattained, the unrealised, still in front of Him. "Even He," it has been well said, "had not at any stage of His earthly life attained to the ultimate and absolute goodness. . . . Not till He had completed the work which had been given Him to do, not till He had gone through the last awful experience on the Cross, and had thus shown Himself 'obedient unto death,' was the last possibility of sin conquered even in His holy life."[1] In the last analysis, *it is only the possibility of sin, even in Jesus, which constitutes the possibility of sinlessness.*

## V

But if our examination brings us thus to the conclusion that the Gospels record no credible act on the part of our Lord which could be construed into sin or even the admission of moral imperfection, we have still left a notable circumstance unmentioned. In the whole bearing of the Man who is portrayed for us in these pages, a thoroughly human Figure, we cannot help noting the total absence of one universal human experience—that of a consciousness of moral guilt. He never prays for forgiveness, though He directs others to do so; He expresses no need of reconciliation; He has no seasons of self-abasement, born of a sense of transgression. He knew times of sorrow and sadness, but never a moment, apparently, in which He was conscious

[1] Griffith-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

of a conflict between Himself and God. The more we reflect upon this circumstance, the more will it impress us. For this feature is not at all likely to be the result of conscious literary art on the part of the Synoptists. In the one or two instances in which we have seen Matthew trying to tone down incidents or sayings which seemed to him out of harmony with the character of Jesus, the attempt was so obvious as to betray itself at once; and when the author of the Fourth Gospel, whose literary skill is throughout so much more conspicuous than that of the Synoptic writers, makes Jesus protest His sinlessness again and again, we feel that these very protestations show the hand of the Evangelist rather than the mind of Christ. If we wish to realise how difficult it is to portray a blameless character convincingly, or in such a manner as to enlist our sympathy, we need only turn to Tennyson's King Arthur, whose conscious goodness after a while commences to arouse the positive antagonism of the healthy-minded reader. Now the goodness of Jesus never strikes us as unnatural, artificial, in one word, as a pose; it is all part of Him, and integral to the picture. But if the writers of the Gospels succeed where a great poet very palpably failed, must not the reason be sought in the Original their pens portrayed?

Once more let us point out the uniqueness of the feature which we are discussing. With all other spiritual heroes and leaders of whose inner lives some record has been left, a keen sense of sin is the accompaniment of

their moral growth; they are conscious of their shortcomings, their defeats in "the duel between spirit and clay," far more acutely than men who stand on a lower level. Just as a trained musician's teeth are set on edge by a slip or discord which ordinary ears might fail to detect, or dismiss as trivial, so it is the saint who is tortured by a feeling of unworthiness, and bewails imperfections in himself of which others are quite unconscious. But in Jesus there is nothing of this; the serenity of His vision of God is unclouded, His communion with the Father unbroken; He lives, and everything shows that He lives, in perfect harmony with the Divine will. How shall we account for this unmistakable impression He conveys to us, but in this way—that the Gospels record no sin in connection with Jesus because there really was no sin to record, because He never succumbed in the contest, but overcame every lower impulse victoriously, holding every thought and feeling in the firm control of a will attuned to the Will of His Father? We come back to this — He was "without sin," not because He was supernaturally preserved from feeling its allurements, but because He was capable of not yielding to them, closing with besetting frailty in a stern death-grapple, and emerging victoriously from the combat.

## VI

There remains the question of the "thirty silent years." Is here, at least, a reverent agnosticism the

only attitude which we are justified in adopting? Yes, if His character, so far as the Gospel records reveal it, was merely pre-eminently good; no, if the conclusion we have just come to is the true one—if that character exhibits a unique power to resist and triumph over temptation. In the latter case we shall have to ask ourselves, What must have been the preparation for such an unparalleled phenomenon as is exhibited for us in the Gospel narratives? What are the antecedents we may legitimately, and with the greatest amount of psychological probability, infer from what we know? If during the period of which we can form a judgment Jesus was sinless, can this ability to keep Himself unspotted from every suggestion of evil have resulted from previous experiences of struggle ending in occasional though even rare defeat? We can only say that such a supposition strikes us as altogether forced and unlikely. In those who have thus gradually emancipated themselves from besetting sins, not without suffering grievous wounds in the conflict, even the final victory does not obliterate the scars that attest the fierceness of the encounter; but the soul of Jesus is unscarred, His consciousness is free from those painful recollections of bygone failures which survive even the gaining of ultimate triumph. "The ground-tone of His whole self-consciousness," as has been truly said, "is rather the *undisturbed* sense of communion with God." Our final conclusion, which seems to us to be reasonably founded, is that those thirty years in Nazareth must

have corresponded in character with the period related by the Evangelists. If He grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man, it was a growth from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, perfect at each successive stage, without intervals of alienation, repentance, darkened moral vision, interrupted communion with God. "His life must be conceived as a development from original innocence to completed holiness, as the continuous preservation of a disposition originally at one with God through all His intercourse with an evil world" (Beyschlag). Such as we see Him in the Gospels He must have been during the years spent in His village home, while His character was forming, His spiritual insight deepening, the lovely flower of the perfect life unfolding leaf by leaf; or, to vary the metaphor, the whole life was a seamless, stainless robe, of uniform texture and flawless purity. In this sense we may, and do, believe in His complete sinlessness.

He was tempted—truly, severely pressed and beset—as we are, yet without sin; there was nothing illusory about His struggles, no element of unreality or hint of a foregone conclusion to detract from the awful solemnity of that agony in the Garden. It is the fact that He really wrestled, and really overcame, which gives its practical significance to His life, and invests it with unique stimulus and encouragement for all His followers. When we pass through temptation, through sorrow, through heartache; when we feel our powers of

resistance ebbing in the strife, and are on the point of surrendering to the disordered desire, the base suggestion, the luring voice, we may take comfort and renew our strength in the thought of that One who, though He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, was able to quench all the fiery darts of evil. It is the example of His triumph which "giveth us the victory over sin," by showing victory to be possible; that is the lesson, to be known and read of all men, which is written in the life of Him who "though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been made perfect, became unto all that obey Him the Author of eternal salvation."

## CHAPTER III

### DID HE WORK MIRACLES?

THE question heading this chapter is still among the principal ones that are being asked concerning Jesus Christ: yet there is no mistaking the fact that recent years have witnessed a remarkable change in the attitude towards this subject on the part of many who answer the question itself very emphatically in the affirmative. A simple illustration will serve to bring home to the reader the nature of the phenomenon to which we refer. In 1836 a Unitarian of the stamp of James Martineau still declared the belief "that Christ really wrought the miracles ascribed to Him" to be "necessary to constitute a disciple of Christ,"[1] affirming that no one could rightly be called a Christian who did not accept as historical the miraculous narratives of the Gospel; in 1908 an Evangelical theologian of the stamp of Dr. Horton states that "no wise apologist . . . would identify the faith in Jesus with belief in the miracles recorded in the Gospels," and speaks of a scholar who does not accept these miracles as "a devout and earnest Christian."[2] Not so long ago

[1] *Rationale of Religious Inquiry* (reprinted under the title *What is Christianity?*), p. 14.

[2] *My Belief*, p. 142.

the miracles used to be cited as amongst the chiefest proofs of the uniqueness and Divinity of our Lord—to-day His unique Personality is invoked in support of the wonderful deeds ascribed to Him by the Evangelists; once these marvels were confidently appealed to as His credentials—to-day it is He who renders them credible. It would be labouring the obvious to point out how far-reaching is the change from the first to the second of these attitudes; at the same time the fact that such a transition has been actually accomplished, practically within living memory, cannot be too vividly borne in mind.

## I

There is little necessity for prefacing our inquiry by an abstract discussion having for its object to define what a miracle is. "It is very easy," as Dr. Abbott feelingly observes, "to be misty about miracles, with a mistiness of speech resulting (let us hope) from nothing worse than mistiness in thought. . . . The use of abstract terms and general propositions, in connection with miracles, leads sometimes to misunderstanding, sometimes to endless and fruitless controversy, and sometimes to a sort of 'wriggling,' or evasion that borders on intellectual dishonesty. . . . Quibble and quarrel as we may about the definition of 'miracle,' we all recognise the distinction between the supernatural act of instantaneously withering up sin and the miraculous act of instantaneously withering up a tree."[1]

[1] *Apologia*, pp. 9, 10.

Let us, however, clear away a fruitful source of misunderstanding by saying that the whole subject of the miraculous is viewed out of focus by those apologists who argue that no one can prove miracles as such to be *impossible.* No one whose views need to be taken into consideration is in the least concerned to put forward, far less to " prove," any such absurd contention. The only question to be seriously debated to-day is, not whether a certain class of events could or could not happen, but whether certain definite alleged events did or did not happen ; that is to say, the question is one of evidence, of adequate testimony. The ruling idea of our age, it has been said, is to be found in the *historical* way of looking at things ; and the assertion that certain miraculous occurrences took place on certain occasions has to be decided by the application of the self-same tests as those which we apply to any other statements in the field of history.

Yet there can be no doubt that the miraculous, as such, is viewed in our day in a different manner, is approached from a different standpoint, from that of earlier ages. Not only the modern, scientific study of history, with its passionless demand for satisfactory proof, has brought this result about, nor yet only modern physical science, with its axiom of the uniformity of nature : two other causes have powerfully worked in the same direction.

One of these is the closer and more sympathetic study of comparative religion, showing not merely that every faith that has held sway over men has had its cycle of miracles, but that the same *kind* of miracle stories tend

to be evolved in different religions under similar circumstances. Once we are face to face with a number of such parallelisms, it is no longer easy *a priori* to dismiss the incidents in question as fictions when they occur in connection with one historic faith, and to accept precisely similar stories as indubitable fact when they are told in connection with another. Though we may have the strongest and most convincing reasons for declining to believe that these coincidences are due to borrowing, the coincidences themselves remain startling, and cannot but give rise to serious reflections: men ask, and cannot help asking, themselves—Why is such and such an incident legend in one religion, and history in another?

The second contributory cause is the change which has gradually taken place in the prevailing conception of God's being and manifestation. When God was predominantly regarded as outside of, and locally remote from, the universe, it was quite natural to look upon an occasional departure from the general physical order as a special manifestation of Divine power and wisdom; it was believed that, as a general rule, the world went its own way, but that from time to time God asserted His sovereignty by suspending the action of some of the puny forces He had called into being, and then the heedless children of men were recalled to faith and obedience. But with this more or less external conception of God the corresponding notion of miracle as attesting His existence and power was bound to disappear; we do not nowadays think of nature as acting apart from God, or

of God as standing over against nature, but look upon the processes and regularities of nature itself as expressing the august and unchanging mind and will of the Eternal. We have learned, in the words of Sir Oliver Lodge, "to look for the action of the Deity, if at all, then always." But if the Divine revelation, the Divine guidance and control, are "really continuous, instead of being, as we expected, intermittent," does not such a view inevitably weaken the presumption against any exceptions to that uniformity in which we have come to behold His action? No amount of experience of the unbroken regularity with which the forces of nature operate can demonstrate a reversal of the accustomed order to be impossible; but that every addition to such experience makes its reversal less probable is almost too self-evident to require pointing out. Sir Oliver Lodge certainly represents a large body of modern opinion when he says: "Shall we hope to see the Deity some day step out of Himself and display His might or His love or some other attribute? We can see Him now if we look; if we cannot see, it is only that our eyes are shut. 'Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands or feet': poetry, yes—but also science; the real trend and meaning of science, whether of 'orthodox' science or not." Perhaps all this might be summed up without exaggeration by saying that there exists to-day perceptibly less of an *a priori* disposition to regard miracles as an essential of revelation.

And when we turn from considerations of a theoretical or *a priori* complexion to actual records of miracles, we

cannot fail to be struck by the fact that such accounts invariably reach us from either ages or countries where the idea of natural law is very imperfectly realised—where, *i.e.*, the faculty of accurately observing and correctly reporting events, to say nothing of accounting for them, is as yet in an undeveloped state. We have to count with the fact that nations, like individuals, pass through a period when they are apparently not yet able sharply to separate real from imaginary events; we have even to reckon with the fact that nations, like individuals, while they are in that stage, show a decided preference for the fanciful over the substantial. Nothing could be more instructive under this head than the following remarks of an exceptionally competent observer, Mr. Bernard Lucas, upon the modern Hindu and his outlook:

"He will read history under more or less compulsion, and largely for purposes of examination; but he will revel in mythology. As he watches the progress of some great feat of modern engineering, such as the spanning of a great Indian river, he will betray a certain amount of mild appreciation; but he reserves his enthusiasm for the story of Rama's bridge between India and Ceylon, built with stones brought by the army of monkeys under Hanuman from the far-distant Himalayas, and will point with pride to the chain of rocky islets jutting above the water, the remains of the piers of that mighty causeway along which Rama led his victorious hosts for the deliverance of Sita. . . . He will listen to a lecture on hygiene, in which the lecturer marshals his array of facts to demonstrate that cholera is a water-borne disease, easily preventible by the simple process of boiling all drinking water, and he will go to his house utterly unimpressed and send his women the next day, even if he does not go himself,

to propitiate the goddess of cholera, who, he believes, is afflicting her wayward votaries. *The appeal to facts makes no impression upon him.*"[1]

Similarly, a writer who knows Mohammedanism in North Africa at first hand, M. E. Doutté, as quoted by Professor Percy Gardner, tells us that he has "never spoken to the Arabs about a local saint, even about one still living, without hearing of some recent miracle of his, that a man who had perjured himself broke a limb on leaving the saint's presence, that another had been rooted to the ground until he gave up some evil purpose which he had formed, that another endeavouring to enter the grotto of the saint had seen it grow too narrow to admit him." It even seems that these modern Muslims have no difficulty in crediting a story about a saint who, when travelling in a railway train, caused it to stop at the time of prayer, so that no efforts of the engineer's could move it until the prayer was ended ; the one thing for which it never occurs to these people to ask, is evidence ! In fact, they believe in miracles because they like them.

In judging of such tales of the marvellous, whether ancient or modern, we never fail to make allowance for these facts, *viz.*, the unfamiliarity of our witnesses with the conception of natural law, their lack of training in accuracy as we understand it, and, above all, their natural liking for the extraordinary ; nor are modern scholars of moderate views altogether disinclined to apply similar reasonings even to the New Testament. When so

[1] *The Empire of Christ*, pp. 55, 56.

circumspect a theologian as Professor Sanday observes "We may be sure that if the miracles of the first century had been wrought before trained spectators of the twentieth, the version of them would be quite different,"[1] even such a guarded admission carries us a long way—especially if we ask ourselves what "quite different" may mean in such a connection; when, on the other hand, the writer of the article on "Miracles," in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, says of the angelic annunciations of the Saviour's birth, of the angels' song, of the Voice from heaven, and the descent of the dove at the Lord's Baptism, that "we are free to admit that they are such as were not unlikely to be added to the Gospel tradition by disciples and by the first Christian community, who were not entirely freed from Jewish prepossessions," we may point out that such a principle, once admitted, is capable of a much wider application than it receives in the passage just quoted.

That miracles follow in the wake of the saint, often growing with bewildering rapidity, is a sufficiently familiar fact, which has been illustrated over and over again. Professor Sanday says,[2] "It is speaking within the mark to say that a large part of the evidence for the Gospel miracles, including some of those that are most miraculous, is separated from the facts by an interval of not more than thirty years." But it is also true that we have a biography of the Persian prophet, the Báb,

[1] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 104.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

written in the lifetime of his widow, and only thirty years after he had suffered martyrdom in 1850—a biography full of miracles, supported by the evidence of eye-witnesses, and including even a transfiguration. And even better known is the circumstance that, while the first life of St. Francis of Assisi, which was written twenty years after his death, was free from miraculous elements, the biography written by Bonaventura, after another twenty years had passed, is full of marvels and stories of direct Divine intervention. Indeed, in the case of Becket, as Dr. Edwin Abbott has shown us, five years seems to have been a period sufficiently long for maturing narratives which teem with miracles of the most varied description, based on the "veracious relation" of eye-witnesses, and, nevertheless, recording "portentous falsehoods, or let us rather say non-facts."

That the considerations which we have hastily passed under review produce a certain cumulative effect, which has diminished a great many people's readiness to believe in miracles generally, is not often denied; as a matter of fact, there has been a very distinct tendency, and that among theologians who may fairly be reckoned as conservative, to surrender the historical character of many of the miraculous narratives in the Old Testament, such as the speaking of Balaam's ass, the arrest of sun and moon in obedience to Joshua's command, the sojourn of Jonah in the sea monster, etc. Such, from having been regarded as buttresses of the faith, are now very generally felt to constitute difficulties and

hindrances. When, however, we cross the frontier between the Old Testament and the New, we stand in the presence of a Greater than the very mightiest personages in the Jewish dispensation, in the presence of the Son of God. To this unique Figure we apply no ordinary standards, and the miracles said to have been performed by His hand claim separate and careful investigation. We may hold, with Professor W. Adams Brown, that miracle "is as much a part of the primitive view of the world as the universality of law is a part of the universe of modern science;"[1] but what of the particular wonderful works ascribed to Jesus Christ?

## II

If we may be allowed a preliminary remark, we do not think that much is gained by statements like that of a recent writer on this subject, who tells us that "a belief in these occurrences as vital parts of the Christian revelation is rising, compared with which all previous belief is feeble and superficial." Such an ignoring or denial of patent difficulties serves no useful object; it may even have the unfortunate effect of reviving the memorable gibe of Celsus concerning "the want of intellectual seriousness" with which he reproached the Christians of his day. We shall ask ourselves in the first place whether the Gospel miracles are what is called "congruous" with the Person concerning whom they are related; whether they are integral to the Gospel story;

[1] *Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 224.

whether the greatness of our Lord is either guaranteed by these miracles, or in turn constitutes their guarantee.

This argument from "congruity" has been formulated by Dr. Illingworth as follows: "If the Incarnation was a fact, and Jesus Christ was what He claimed to be, His miracles, so far from being improbable, will appear the most natural thing in the world. . . . They are so essentially a part of the character depicted in the Gospels, that without them that character would entirely disappear. They flow naturally from a Person who, despite His obvious humanity, impresses us as being at home in two worlds. . . . We cannot separate the wonderful life, or the wonderful teaching, from the wonderful works. They involve and interpenetrate and presuppose each other, and form in their insoluble combination one harmonious picture."[1]

Without prejudging the issue, let us look at this statement a little more carefully. It is, of course, undeniable that if what Dr. Illingworth means by the Incarnation is once conceded, there is a strong probability in favour of the belief that One whose very birth was miraculous wielded miraculous powers over nature; such an argument, however, will not convince those who do not grant the presupposition on which it is based. Neither do we think that the character portrayed by the Evangelists would "entirely disappear" apart from the miracles ascribed to our Lord; such a statement would really make it appear as though that character were manifested solely

[1] *Divine Immanence*, quoted by Sanday, *op. cit.*, pp. 114, 115.

in the field of the marvellous, and strangely overlooks the pure love of God and man, the singleness of purpose, the gentleness, the fortitude, the wisdom, the burning hatred of evil, and a hundred other traits and qualities which come out in the Gospel narratives where no miracle is mentioned. Least of all, perhaps, shall we admit that the wonderful teaching involves and presupposes the wonderful works; one has only to test such a general proposition by descending to a particular instance—to ask whether, *e.g.*, the parable of the Prodigal Son involves and presupposes the possession and exercise of supernatural powers over the seen world on the part of the Narrator—in order to see the baselessness of this contention. The true greatness of our Lord does not need to be commended or made credible by His ability to suspend the ordinary course of physical nature; being spiritual, it must be spiritually discerned, and cannot be physically demonstrated. All that remains of this argument—and there is no reason why this should be minimised—is (1) that there is nothing incredible in an exceptional personality exhibiting the ascendancy of mind over matter in an exceptional manner; and (2) that the miracles told in the Gospels, taken together, exhibit in a remarkable degree the qualities of spontaneity, dignity, helpfulness and moral purpose, and are thus in accord with the character of Jesus Himself.

At this point, however, a question of paramount importance and interest arises, and claims our attention: What was the attitude of Jesus Himself towards the

subject of miracles? Did He lay stress upon His power to perform such mighty works? Did He point to that power, or give illustrations of it, in order to accredit Himself as Divinely commissioned? The answer to that question cannot fail to throw light upon the whole subject which we are investigating; and for such an answer we turn to a passage like Mark viii. 11, 12: "And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. And He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, Why doth this generation seek a sign? verily, I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation."[1]

We may take leave to doubt whether the implications of these remarkable verses, and their parallels from other Gospels, have been duly weighed and appreciated by the majority of readers; for their significance, when rightly considered, is little less than startling. What is the situation? Here is One who, according to the records, was constantly performing acts which showed Him to be possessed of the most extraordinary powers over animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic nature—One who, according to this very Gospel, had but just given a display of supernatural endowments by multiplying a few loaves and fishes, so as to satisfy the hunger of four thousand people, all of whom had witnessed the portent: yet, when He is asked by the leaders of popular religion to show them a sign by

[1] Cp. Matt. xvi. 1—4, xii. 38, 39; Luke xi. 29, 30.

which to accredit Himself, He absolutely refuses, and expresses His strong disapproval of the demand to boot. "This generation is an evil generation," is His comment, according to Luke's version; "it seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites"—*viz.*, a warning of approaching doom, unless they repented—"so shall also the Son of man be to this generation."[1]

Jesus, then, warmly repudiates the suggestion that He is to present credentials of His mission and authority by performing miracles; He regards that suggestion as altogether unworthy and unspiritual, the mark of a low religious standard, and says expressly that no such sign shall be given; His words have that decided accent which implies that a distasteful subject is not to be reopened. Now, this utterance is unquestionably historical, because no one at a later date would have invented it; but if its genuineness admits of no doubt, then we must needs ask ourselves, Are these the words, is this the attitude, of One who is in the habit of doing

[1] Matt. xii. 40 is, as a comparison with Luke xi. 29—32 clearly shows, an interpolation—probably a marginal gloss which has found its way into the text, and which had its origin in a misunderstanding of the reference to the "sign of Jonah." That "sign" was the prophet's call to the Ninevites to repent—and this was the analogy to our Lord's preaching (cp. Mark i. 15)—not his sojourn in the whale; what the "evil generation" of that day needed, was precisely the preaching of repentance, not the performance of miracles.

the very thing which He indignantly refuses to do when asked? That question is not answered when it is said that what our Lord took exception to was only the idea of proving His authority by exercising miraculous power; for according to our records He had already done this of His own accord in curing the paralytic at Capernaum (Mark ii. 10, 11). But more than this, if He had been in the habit of working miracles in the presence of impartial witnesses, and had only just given the most astounding proof of His superhuman power, would the Pharisees have addressed such a demand to Him at all, which reads exactly as if they had asked Him to do a thing the like of which He had never done before? And could He Himself have thought much of miracles as attesting His authority, seeing the scathingly contemptuous manner in which He sweeps this request on one side? So far from regarding the performance of such portents by Himself as "the most natural thing in the world," and "essentially a part of" His character, He stigmatised the demand for such feats as typical of a wicked and faithless generation. To make the acceptance of these occurrences as historical a test of belief in the greatness of our Lord is thus to erect a standard which He Himself condemned in advance with no lack of emphasis.

And this brings us to yet another point, to which we would ask the reader to give his dispassionate attention. The contemporaries of Jesus were evidently of a temperament which keenly relished the supernatural, as much on the look-out for the marvellous as the Athenians

were for the novel and unhackneyed—that was just what He complained of in them: give them but some display which they could interpret as a "sign," and they were ready to believe in the worker's Divine commission and authority. But if this is so, then we are driven to the question, Why did our Lord so obviously fail to impress people who were particularly open to this *kind* of impression? Given an intensely miracle-loving population, surely such an exhibition of miraculous powers as we read recorded in the Gospels ought to have produced the most absolute and unshakable conviction among them, and to have guaranteed the success of a ministry in which such manifestations were every-day incidents. The people might not have understood the exalted teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, but they could hardly have failed to understand such an *argumentum ad hominem* as the multiplication of loaves and fishes! Yet, as Professor Burkitt points out, even the apostles "had not been influenced by the events of these two meals, a circumstance which would be indeed incredible if these events had come to pass in the way generally supposed." We have to recognise the fact, as the same scholar remarks, that "whatever our own judgment may be with regard to what is commonly called the 'supernatural,' it is evident that the occurrences related in the Gospels were not things which impressed the adversaries of Jesus. . . . Nay more, occurrences which are certainly related as 'miracles' by the Evangelist did not greatly impress even the disciples

themselves."[1] But nothing is more certain than that friends and foes would have been enormously impressed by these events, had they taken place "in the way generally supposed;" if they were nevertheless not impressed, is not the inference inevitable? We can only express that inference by once more quoting Professor Sanday's remark that if these events had been witnessed by trained spectators, the version of them would have been "quite different." We are not for the moment offering any hypothesis to account for the form assumed by this miracle, or making any guess as to the substratum of fact underlying that one; but that this class of incidents should have been enacted as we read them, and yet produced so little effect upon contemporary opinion, we regard as psychologically incredible.

## III

Nevertheless, whatever may be the discount to which a sober yet reverent criticism must subject the miraculous element in the Gospels, the one supposition which is quite untenable is that which would deny that Jesus wrought extraordinary deeds, such as, quite apart from His preaching, attracted attention to Him. Unquestionably, He performed many such deeds; unquestionably, that is to say, He possessed and used powers of healing, and was famous for the cures He effected. We may go further than this, and say that He owed the rapid spread of His fame during the earlier period of His ministry, and

[1] *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, p. 73.

a great deal of the popularity which marked that period, but which does not seem to have been permanent, to the exercise of these healing gifts rather than to the character of His message; that it was for this that the multitudes beleaguered Him, "insomuch that He could no more openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places: and they came to Him from every quarter" (Mark i. 45). We are led to surmise that our Lord felt incommoded, hindered in His real work, by this healing activity, much as His Divine compassion constrained Him to deny His help to none that sought it; this at any rate seems the only adequate explanation of His stringent command to those whom He had cured to "say nothing to any man"—an injunction which was habitually disregarded, as, indeed, could not fail to be the case, ever fresh relays of patients coming with the clamorous demand to be restored to health, insomuch that at times the Master and His disciples "had not leisure so much as to eat" (Mark vi. 31).

We shall not waste time in a terminological discussion as to whether these cures were, or were not, miracles; the main point is that, in the words of the late Professor A. B. Bruce, "the healing ministry, judged by critical tests, stands on as firm historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teaching."[1] This admitted, however, two points immediately call for notice.

(1) Whatever were the powers our Lord exercised in driving out diseases, He Himself distinctly disclaimed

[1] *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Jesus."

the idea that they differed in kind from those exercised by other men in His own time. When the Pharisees attempt to arouse prejudice against Him by the malicious suggestion that His cures of demoniacs show Him to be in league with Beelzebub, He has His answer ready: "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges." Nothing could be more utterly frank and devoid of an atom of *arrière-pensée*: He is not the only one to work cures of this particular kind—why, then, should His activity be singled out for the innuendo employed by His traducers? His reference is to a well-known class of men, itinerant exorcists, such as we read of in Acts xix. 13 ff., persons who performed similar deeds of healing, though presumably for a fee. The nature of the treatment was what is now known as suggestion, its effectiveness resting upon a strong personality on the part of the healer, and great "suggestibility" on the part of the patient; such a treatment, as is well known, is often extremely efficacious in diseases of the nerves, that part of the organism which has been aptly described as "the battle-ground of will and of matter," and is, of course, widely resorted to in our own day. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader of what is matter of common experience, and admitted by every medical practitioner, *viz.*, how greatly a patient's faith in the method of treatment may aid his recovery, and how difficult it is to restore a despondent case.

(2) Moreover, Jesus was perfectly aware how directly

the recovery of those who sought His help depended upon their own contribution, their own mental attitude. This fact is brought out again and again in the narratives. "Believe ye that I am able to do this? They say unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done unto you" (Matt. ix. 28, 29). And as He makes faith the condition of cure in this instance, so He recognises it as the efficient agent when He says to the woman with the issue (Mark v. 34) and to the leper (Luke xvii. 19), "Thy faith hath made thee whole." The most notable case in point, however, is that of the epileptic boy, related by Mark with such exceptional fulness in chapter ix. 14—29. Here the truth is enforced in unmistakable fashion, that faith and the ability to inspire faith are essential to effect cures, while lack of faith and of the ability to inspire it are fatal obstacles. The disciples have attempted to cast out the demon by whom the boy was supposed to be possessed, and have proved themselves unable to do so; Jesus, on learning this, immediately ascribes the cause of their defeat to absence of faith—the disciples could not impart what they did not themselves possess in sufficient measure. "Bring him unto Me," is the Master's command. Then, when He gets into conversation with the boy's father, He discovers that the latter, too, is in a state of despondency such as cannot but react upon the Healer Himself, and thus may prove an unpropitious condition. The disciples' exhibition of impotence has deepened the man's hopelessness: his

"If Thou canst do anything," is not a very encouraging mode of address. "If Thou canst!" Jesus repeats reproachfully, in wondering disapproval. "Nothing can be done in such a case on a hypothesis; and one who has faith will not think of using such words. One who believes boldly enough in the goodness and the present power of God will feel that no symptoms, no difficulties, can stand in the way of God's intention. All things will appear to him to be possible. The father at once sees this; the faith of Jesus has inspired him also with faith. He is on the side of God now and against the demon, and believes that good is to conquer evil. 'I believe,' he says; 'I see that my unbelief has been the great obstacle, but do you help me in spite of that!'"[1] Finally, where Jesus met with a settled want of faith in Himself, His message and His power—indeed, with a general unfriendly disposition—as in His native Nazareth, He Himself felt chilled, rendered powerless by the absence of responsiveness and confidence. "And He could do there no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mark vi. 5, 6).

The healing powers of our Lord, then, were unquestionably real; but though we may think them likely to have been exceptional in degree, they were not so in kind. Jesus shared them with other men of His own day, who plied the same gifts professionally; similar acts of healing are recorded of the apostles, and

[1] Menzies, *The Earliest Gospel*, pp. 179, 180.

are met with all through the ages, attesting the dominion of mind over matter. Thus, in the middle of the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux speaks concerning his own experiences in the following terms: "I cannot think what these miracles mean, or why God has thought fit to work them through such an one as I. I do not remember to have read even in Scripture of anything more wonderful. Signs and wonders have been wrought by holy men and by deceivers. I feel conscious neither of holiness nor deceit. I know that I have not those saintly merits which are illustrated by miracles. I trust, however, that I do not belong to the number of those who do wonderful things in the name of God, and yet are unknown of the Lord." To this singularly sane and modest statement it needs only to be added that, as Professor Gardner has pointed out, those who work cures in this manner, though usually men of some distinction, are by no means always noted for high moral or spiritual qualities, and that whatever it may be that gives to one man this power over others, it is not always the possession of the highest ethical and religious qualities. Not the capacity *per se*, but the manner of its exercise by our Lord—the pity which inspired, the unselfishness which accompanied, it—can be invoked as proof of His Divine mission.

## IV

This view of our Lord's deeds of healing, however, which on the one hand limits them to nervous and mental affections, and on the other insists upon the element of

faith as a condition of their success, has been strongly controverted by a recent writer, whose medical qualifications entitle him to a respectful hearing on the part of non-specialists.[1] Dr. Ryle holds that this theory does not cover the facts to which it is supposed to apply : "the cases are too numerous, and they are not of the sort among which we look for cures of the faith-healing kind." He opposes the weight of his professional knowledge to the assertion that paralysis, mental disease, and various kinds of nervous disorder are all susceptible of emotional cure, and can be made to yield to a strong mental impression straightway. He urges that before committing ourselves to such an explanation, we ought to go into details regarding the age, the sex, the life-histories of the sufferers, to inquire into the conditions under which the cures took place, and then to ask whether these facts, as well as the character of the diseases stated to have been cured, fit in with the neurotic and faith-healing theory.

Granting, in the first place, the extreme desirability of ascertaining the details enumerated by Dr. Ryle, we must nevertheless face the fact that our information on most of these points is extremely defective. Of the ages and the life-histories of the patients we know, as a rule, nothing worth mentioning, while the testimony regarding the conditions under which the cures took place, not being that of eye-witnesses, is much too uncertain to be of help. Apart from this demand, however, which is simply

[1] *The Neurotic Theory of the Miracles of Healing*, by J. Ryle, M.A., M.D., Hibbert Journal, April, 1907, p. 572 ff.

incapable of fulfilment, it must be admitted that such diseases as, *e.g.*, fever, leprosy, blindness, hardly lend themselves to "psycho-therapy"; while even the non-medical mind can grasp the fact that true paralysis, as distinct from the hysterical variety which is generally confined to women and girls, could not be removed by an emotional shock.

We are, it has to be confessed, greatly hampered by our ignorance of the circumstances to which Dr. Ryle refers, as well as of another which he does not mention, but which it would have been of the highest interest to know—*viz.*, the after-history of the cases in question, the permanence or otherwise of the cures effected. We are, *e.g.*, unable to tell whether the fever from which Simon's wife's mother was suffering had reached its turning-point just at the time of our Lord's visit to the house; we do not know whether the woman with an issue was healed for good, or experienced a temporary relief under the stress of strong emotion; we know nothing of the degree of blindness from which the man at Bethsaida or Bartimæus was suffering, though we happen to know that the method of healing blindness by means of saliva was known and practised among the Jews. Again, we are not in a position to deny that the case of the man borne of four was one of neurotic paralysis, and we have Dr. Ryle's admission that "cases are to be occasionally met with in which the most conspicuous symptom of motor paralysis, namely, an inability to move the limbs by voluntary effort, is found to be curable by a strong

mental impression." As for the case of the man with the withered hand, who would, on the strength of a description which had been loosely transmitted from mouth to mouth for more than a generation before it was committed to paper, adopt the view, which Dr. Ryle assumes "with considerable confidence," that he must have been a sufferer from infantile paralysis,[1] and therefore incurable by moral impression or emotional shock? Dr. Ryle himself gives us an instance of a girl's perfect inability to use her foot—an inability which existed simply in her imagination, and yielded to her faith in a physician who, in lieu of "treatment," simply assured her that there was nothing the matter with the foot, whereupon she threw down her crutch, and walked out of the house without it.

What we must bear in mind in reading all these stories of cures, is that we have not the accounts of trained observers, nor of first-hand witnesses; we cannot treat the accounts in the Gospels as we should treat the contents of a modern hospital case-book. Tradition is apt to magnify the unusual, and our records represent the results of thirty and more years of tradition busily at work upon the original material. This observation will help us to trace to its probable source such a story as the cleansing of the leper, told in Mark i. 40—45. Assuredly, this horrible disease could not be instantaneously conquered by moral therapeutics; yet it cannot

[1] "The evidence," says Professor Burkitt, "is hardly sufficient for us to found any medical doctrine about the cure."

be doubted that it is an immediate cure which the Evangelist wishes us to understand as having taken place. The narrative, however, suffers from another initial difficulty, in addition to that attaching to the cure itself. A man actually in a state of leprosy would scarcely have dared to come close up to Jesus, but would have addressed Him from a distance, as did the lepers mentioned in Luke xvii. 12; if this leper ventured into the immediate proximity of human beings, then his case must have presented some unusual feature. Can we arrive at a guess as to what this feature may have been? We believe that the clue is to be found in the word translated "make clean"; this term, as Professor Menzies points out, is used in the Septuagint version of Lev. xiii. and xxiv. to describe the priestly act of pronouncing clean, and thus readmitting to ordinary social relationships, one who has suffered from leprosy. We may therefore assume, as the surmise presenting the least difficulty, that this was a case where a patient, although recovered from this disease, had for some reason not been able to obtain the priest's certificate, and was thus debarred from all social intercourse, though no hygienic reason existed for his being kept any longer in quarantine. Under these circumstances, he approaches Jesus with the request that He will do what the priest refuses to do—declare him free from disease; and Jesus, by touching the man, shows that He regards him as restored to health, and fit to return to his friends, at the same time insisting that he is to obtain his official

certificate through the regular channels. If this was what actually took place, it is not difficult to see how in course of time the belief would grow up that at the touch of the Master's hand the dread malady was put to flight, and the man who had just presented the repulsive appearance of a leper, foul and ulcerous, departed from His presence like Naaman of old emerged from Jordan, with flesh "as the flesh of a little child."

Dr. Ryle, however, has yet another objection to the "neurotic theory" to offer: he finds it impossible to imagine that clinical material of this particular kind—*viz.*, neuropaths—was scattered up and down Palestine in such abundance ; and if Jesus succeeded in healing only this small and limited group of sufferers, he asks—"*What then of the failures?*"

In reply, we would point to the fact that a very large proportion of the cases recorded for us were those of supposed "demoniacs," *i.e.*, of nervous disorders, frequently—if not predominantly—induced by the very belief which ascribed any and every ailment to demoniacal "possession" ; given such a current view of the ætiology of disease, firmly rooted in the popular mind, it is not at all "impossible to imagine" that clinical material of this particular variety should have been woefully frequent among a race notoriously predisposed to mental and nervous disorders—just as another kind of "clinical material," namely, witches, was scattered up and down Europe in abundance when people believed in witchcraft. As for the failures, our earliest witness

does not suggest that every case submitted to Jesus was a cure; in relating what happened at Capernaum, he tells us that "they brought unto Him *all* that were sick . . . and He healed *many*" (Mark i. 32—34)—though Matthew shows the growth of tradition by reporting the same incident in the form that "they brought unto Him *many* . . . and He healed *all*" (Matt. viii. 16, 17). To speak of "failures" would be appropriate only if we had reason for saying that our Lord claimed to be able to banish all the ills that flesh is heir to—that He attempted to do so, and was defeated; that there were occasions when, owing to the unbelieving or hostile attitude of the people, He could do no mighty work, we have already noted.

But among a population eager for "signs," greedy for miracles, it was the actual, striking successes alone that would count, and be recounted—the other would simply be forgotten. And not only would these triumphs of the Master's strong, yet gentle, personality over the diseased fancies of "demoniacs" be repeated from mouth to mouth, but repetition would inevitably lead to exaggeration. If He had healed nervous diseases, rumour would magnify these cures, add other and more marvellous cases, and more and more transfer the Lord's activity to the miraculous plane. We have just seen this process of ornamentation, this growth of the marvellous, illustrated in comparing Mark's account of the healings at Capernaum with Matthew's, an instance which we may well regard as typical. When legends begin to grow

they are apt to develop rapidly; though at first no larger than a grain of mustard seed, yet, if but the soil be favourable, we shall ere long find a full-grown tree, in whose branches the birds of the heaven may find shade and lodgment. A child lying apparently at death's door in a state of unconsciousness, and gently awakened by the Lord, would easily come to be described as having been dead and brought back to life by Him—even though He distinctly stated that death had not taken place.[1] If, at the time when He delivered some poor crazy fellow from the delusion that he was inhabited by a legion of unclean spirits, a herd of swine stampeded down a steep incline and were lost to view, superstition would have no difficulty in drawing the conclusion that He had conjured the devils into the creatures—a very fitting habitation for them, the Jews probably thought. If a sudden squall on the lake, rising while Jesus lay in the boat asleep, ceased as suddenly when He was aroused and looked round, it would in retrospect be thought and said that it was He who stilled the waves and commanded the wind to cease. At the same time we cannot but assume that these and other wonder stories did not reach their present form until some time after

[1] We have an illustration, in the story of the epileptic boy, of the readiness with which bystanders declared life to be extinct, when there was only the stillness of exhaustion following a paroxysm (Mark ix. 26). That our Lord shared the theories of disease current among His contemporaries should present no difficulties to those who accept His real manhood *ex animo*, and without reservations.

His death; had they been current, and firmly believed, during His lifetime, it is, as we have already said, incredible that those who witnessed these events, and even the disciples themselves, should have been so little impressed by them. How, for instance, could the latter have been thrown into distress by the discovery that they had forgotten to take provisions along with them, if they had but just recently witnessed such a stupendous miracle, repeated twice over, as the feeding of thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes, whole basketfuls of broken pieces remaining over?

V

Possibly, however, the latter story points to an explanation which, if true, would account for a good deal. We are referring to the constant use made by our Lord of picturesque and metaphorical language—language exceedingly expressive, but also, with dull persons, proportionately liable to misinterpretation. Let us give a typical instance before we come to the particular case under discussion. When the imprisoned Baptist sends his message inquiring whether Jesus is "He that cometh"—a circumscription for the Messiah—our Lord's reply is couched in the language of metaphor: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up." These expressions, it seems to us, are plainly metaphors, referring to moral and spiritual healings—otherwise they would represent just such an appeal to outward "signs" as Jesus deprecates; but they would

be almost inevitably understood in a literal sense, and become the starting-point of a number of stories of physical blindness, lameness, leprosy, deafness, having been cured, and even of dead people being recalled to life, whereas the reference probably was to some who had been quickened when they were "dead through their trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1).

To return, however, to the incident immediately before us, *viz.*, the disciples' evident distress on finding that they had left their provisions on shore. The meaning of an obviously figurative remark of their Master's, bidding them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, is quite lost on them, and reminds them only of the predicament they are in. Now, if Jesus, finding Himself misunderstood, wished to make it clear to the disciples that He had referred to the *teaching* of the Pharisees, and not to an ingredient of actual food, would He have pointed in His reply to a miracle in which actual food played the principal part? For this reference to the feeding of the multitudes to have any relevance, is it not necessary to assume that *this* food also was not material nourishment, but nourishment for the soul—that in both cases He alludes to forms of *teaching*?

And now are we beginning to see how this story, so difficult for us to believe as fact, may have originated, namely, in a parable told by Jesus, and itself based upon an Old Testament reminiscence, *viz.*, the legendary feeding of a hundred men with twenty barley loaves by Elisha (2 Kings iv. 42—44); as, according to that

ancient chronicle, these hundred "did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord," even so, we may imagine Jesus applying and spiritualising the idea, thousands may be fed with the Word of the Lord itself, and yet plenty be left over to still the hunger of others besides. A reminder of such a parable, recently told, would have been apposite when His followers misinterpreted His allusion to the leaven of the Pharisees; but, alas, the parable itself was destined to be misinterpreted in turn as the story of an actual event, and in course of time came to be told as an episode in the Lord's own ministry, with considerable elaboration of detail.

Indeed, we may trace a similar process—the conversion of an imperfectly remembered or imperfectly understood parable into miracle—not only in the story of the withering of the fig-tree, but in one far more important, *viz.*, the raising of Lazarus. In dealing with this culminating miracle of the Fourth Evangelist's in our introductory chapter, we had not entered into the question of the origin of this narrative, and the steps by which it may have assumed its present shape. To surrender it as history, with such British scholars as Professor Salmon, Professor Burkitt, and Mr. E. F. Scott, is one thing—to treat it as the free invention of the Fourth Evangelist is quite another; nor, as a matter of fact, need we have recourse to such a hypothesis. The Evangelist, even when departing most widely from the Synoptic tradition, uses materials supplied by the Synoptics, taking threads from various narratives, and weaving

them together into a pattern of his own. In the present instance he goes chiefly to Luke's Gospel; it is there that we learn of our Lord's friendship with Martha and Mary; it is there also that we read the parable—told, by the way, without a suggestion that it is a parable, and probably regarded as a true story—of the rich man and Lazarus. This Lazarus, we are told, had died, and been carried into Abraham's bosom; then, when the rich man also died, and found himself in torments, he requested that Lazarus might be sent back to carry warning to his brethren, but had his request refused in the words, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, *if one rise from the dead.*" Here we have the groundwork of the circumstantial narrative in the Fourth Gospel—in this parable of the Lazarus who died, with the hinted possibility that he might have risen again from the dead. Probably before the composition of the Fourth Gospel legend had added to the narrative, "And he actually did rise again, and they did not believe him"; the next stage in the growth of tradition would be that it was Christ Himself who raised him. The intervening steps between the original parable and the finished Johannine narrative must, of course, be conjectural; but that the road actually led from the one to the other, and that it was the closing words of the Lucan story which gave to the Fourth Evangelist the bold and paradoxical idea of making this crowning miracle the very occasion of Christ's arrest and violent death at the hands of those enemies of His who

would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead, is a view which is steadily gaining ground, and which is here commended for acceptance.

In coming to the close of this inquiry, let us briefly summarise the main conclusions to which the considerations passed under review in the preceding pages appear to point.

There is to-day a general disposition to subject miraculous narratives to a much more stringent scrutiny than formerly. This disposition is due to the spread of what may, for convenience' sake, be called the scientific view of nature, the growth of the "historic spirit," and the rise of the comparative study of religion. The first of these has undoubtedly raised the presumption against alleged departures from the observed uniformities of nature, rendering such departures vastly more improbable to us than they appeared to a pre-scientific age; the second has shown us that accounts of such occurrences always reach us from quarters where imagination, enthusiasm, and sheer love of the marvellous are more in evidence than a trained faculty of accurately observing and reporting on phenomena; while the third has familiarised us with the fact that not only are miracles told in connection with all founders of religions, but that the same religious feeling is apt to express itself in substantially similar stories of miracles in connection with different founders. To these causes of the disposition to which we are referring there had, as we saw, to be added the

growth of a conception of God which directs attention in a much larger measure than formerly to His immanence, and is proportionately less inclined *a priori* to look to miracles for proofs of the Divine power, wisdom, and interest in human affairs.

When we turn to the Gospel miracles, we have to bear in mind that these accounts come to us, not from first-hand witnesses, but after a considerable lapse of time, during which there was ample opportunity for the growth of legend—a growth which in some instances we are able to trace by comparing the earliest Gospel with its successors, while "the Johannine narratives, as compared with the Synoptic, uniformly heighten the marvellous element."[1] In deciding the question whether the miracles attributed to our Lord are essential to His greatness, we naturally inquired into His own estimate of, and attitude to, the miraculous, which we found to be strongly adverse to this assumption; His condemnation of the miracle-seeking temper of the people, and His equally emphatic refusal to gratify that temper, are hardly to be reconciled with the habitual performance of such works. At the same time the very prevalence of this popular craving for portents makes it incomprehensible how One who constantly exhibited such powers, and on such a scale, could have failed so signally to carry the people with Him; that He did not gather a much stronger body of adherents, such as would have flocked to a wonder-worker, seems further to show that

[1] Scott, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 165.

His refusal to accredit Himself by "signs" was not merely momentary, but that this was *de facto* not His method.

A real historical basis for the miraculous element in the Gospels is, however, to be found in the gift of healing which our Lord undoubtedly possessed and practised. Making allowance for the part played by exaggeration and misunderstandings, there is nothing in the record of the Evangelists more certain than that Jesus, wherever His power to inspire faith was not met by sheer stubborn opposition, dealt most successfully with a number of diseases, especially those disorders which the age ascribed to "possession." We shall hardly err, however, if we conclude that He Himself regarded this part of His activity as strictly subordinate, and in a measure a hindrance, to His main purpose, which was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Hence His repeated urgent injunctions to those whom He had restored to health not to spread the news abroad. That these orders were hardly ever obeyed was natural enough; nevertheless, the Master seems to have felt that the time devoted to curing bodily ailments was taken from His real work, and moreover gave to His ministry a complexion which He was anxious to avoid imparting to it.

But if thus an unfettered criticism tends to reduce the area of the marvellous in the Gospels, as that area has been reduced elsewhere, we may well think that the time has come for frankly facing the question—Does Jesus Christ appear less sublime a Figure, less deserving

of our reverence, of our gratitude, of our hearts' affection and worship, if He did not turn water into wine, or multiply food, or transfer demons into swine? Is He shorn of some attribute which makes all the difference, if we hold that He did not do these things—is it these marvels and portents on the physical plane for which we hold Him dear? To these queries we return the deliberate answer, that *not only is the power to perform miracles not essential to the greatness of our Lord, but the emphasis placed upon the miraculous element has obscured His true greatness more than any other single cause.* It was He Himself who uttered in advance His unsparing censure of the spiritual blindness which is seeking for signs before it will accept the Son of man—the temper which is less impressed by His character, by the grandeur and beauty of His teaching, than by the spectacular and material. Judging thus of Him, we judge ourselves ; nor is His own judgment undecided. "Verily," He exclaimed with deep distaste, hurt at being so little understood or appreciated at His true value, "there shall no sign be given unto this generation." He had the power of healing many ailments, allaying bodily pains of divers descriptions ; but His supremacy lay not in this endowment, which He shared, and admitted that He shared, with others, though where these others plied a lucrative profession, He bestowed healing from a Divine compulsion of pity. That supremacy was rather manifested in what can by no means be disputed—in His deep discernment of the laws of life ; in His utter, self-emptied

goodness; in His unparalleled knowledge of God the Father, and the manner in which He ministered that knowledge to others; in the unfaltering courage with which He proclaimed His good tidings; in His immortal self-sacrifice, prompted by His love for men His brothers.

No, we are not the losers when we have surrendered the tales of signs and wonders which embroider the story of His ministry—surrendered them, that is to say, as history, as the records of actual fact. For it is only when we have done so that we grow aware of the real value and significance of these marvellous narratives, which are symbols of truth, after all—the all-important and all-sufficient truth that He Himself is the Miracle, the great Sign of God, sent in the fulness of time to reveal to the world the innermost of God and the uttermost of man, in the unearthly harmony of a perfect life. Once in history God and man were shown completely at one; yet man was never more human, and God was never more Divine, than in that One whom we name the Christ. That is the deathless miracle, by whose side all merely physical portents show small and insignificant—the Light of the World, at whose rising all others pale their ineffectual fires—the miracle of "Immanuel," God with us; we need no other

## CHAPTER IV

### HAD HE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS?

In the earlier stages of our Lord's ministry there is some reason to believe that the relations between Himself and the scribes and Pharisees were not altogether unfriendly. We find scribes among His listeners; we read of a scribe saying to Him, "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest" (Matt. viii. 19); while His own reference to "every scribe who hath been made a disciple of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii. 52) implies that there were not a few such. Again, we read of His accepting the hospitality of Pharisees who bade Him to dinner, an honoured Guest; such an episode as the visit of Nicodemus may well rest on a genuine tradition; in fact, the probabilities are that this class of men was at first inclined to take a friendly interest in One who proclaimed the nearness of that Kingdom for which the devout elements in the nation were looking so anxiously.

Closer contact, however, served to bring out the utter disparity between the outlook of the scribes and Pharisees on the one hand and of Jesus on the other; and nowhere was that contrast so certain to lead to conflict as in regard to the all-important topics of sin and forgiveness. To the Pharisees—who were by no means monsters of

wickedness, but sincere and narrow fanatics—our Lord's attitude towards sinners was simply bewildering; they themselves shunned the polluting touch of even the ritually unclean—He mixed with all and sundry. Their hard self-righteousness was the outcome of their whole way of thinking on religious matters, while His gentleness in dealing with frail humanity probably impressed them as deplorable laxity; such leniency as He displayed towards the woman taken in adultery deepened the distrust with which they viewed Him; while, worst of all, He declared on more than one occasion that certain persons' sins were forgiven—a direct and unheard-of defiance of law and tradition.

## I

The issues raised in this latter connection are of such importance that it will assist us briefly to rehearse the two incidents which represent our Lord as granting sinners absolution. On the first of these occasions (Matt. ii. 1—12) we see Him teaching in Peter's house in Capernaum, beleaguered by listeners whose number included some scribes—men whose general religious outlook was probably identical with that of the Pharisees. While the Master is speaking, a procession approaches, four men bearing a fifth on a stretcher, determined to gain access to the Rabbi whose fame as a Healer has quickly spread. To enter the house in the ordinary way proves impossible, the throng being too dense, but the bearers are not to be discouraged from their purpose;

they mount the outer staircase which leads to the roof, take up the wooden joists and waterproof boarding which form the ceiling of the room below, and lower their burden through the aperture to Jesus's feet. Jesus, whom we need not assume to have been without all previous knowledge of this case, is greatly moved by the absolute and resolute confidence displayed; but a glance at the patient, supplemented perhaps by an acquaintance with his antecedents, which have not come down to us, tells Him that the man suffers from something more than physical infirmity. Our narrative is obviously incomplete, and preserves silence on a number of points we should have liked to know. Was there that in the patient's expression which spoke of shame and sorrow, a consciousness of guilt which showed that what he needed was a physician of the soul, more even than a healer of the body? Did no conversation take place prior to the recorded words of Jesus—no explanation on the part of the man himself or his friends? That would have been most unlikely. Above all, what were the symptoms of the case? Paralysis, as used in the Gospels, is a somewhat vague term. Whatever the disease was, and however it might have been caused—possibly through some excess acting on the nervous system—Jesus sees that this man cannot be cured in body until he has been eased in mind, and to the amazement of all He addresses to the sick man the words, "Child, your sins are forgiven." It is only when this assurance has had its effect—and we repeat that its

being given implies almost of necessity some preceding conversation, omitted by the Evangelist—that the Lord proceeds to restore to the sufferer the use of his limbs. But the scribes who witnessed the scene were deeply offended; Jesus, as they put it, had assumed the Divine prerogative—for who can forgive sins, they ask, but One, even God?

On another occasion (Luke vii. 36—50) Jesus was partaking of the hospitality of a Pharisee, when there came into the room a poor "lost" creature out of the street; with an emotion too deep for words she kneels down by the Master's couch, her tears bedew His feet, and with her hair she dries the moisture.[1] She had evidently come under the blessed influence of the Son of man, and had learned from His lips what she had not dared to believe true—that though she was an outcast from men, she was not beyond the pale of the love of God; that love was stronger than sin, and that if she yielded herself to love, her sins would be blotted out. The Lord reads the wondering disapproval in His host's expression, and proceeds to enlighten him: this woman's devotion is the response of her nature to the sense of that pardon which waits upon sincere repentance; and to her, who was melting in tears of gratitude for the ray of hope that had come into her darkened and ruined

[1] There is reason to believe that the detail of the cruse of ointment is erroneously introduced in this place by Luke; it belongs by right to the story of the Last Supper, where Luke omits it.

life through His ministry, He turns with the gracious assurance, "Thy sins are forgiven." But once more the witnesses of this episode are scandalised in the extreme: "Who is this that even forgiveth sins?"

The use made of these two incidents, the interpretation given to them both by the enemies and the followers of Christ, might almost have been foretold. "Who is this that even forgiveth sins?" "Who can forgive sin but One, even God?" Blasphemy! exclaimed the legalists and traditionalists: this man makes Himself equal with God! The retort from His adherents was inevitable: if their Lord had made such a claim, they argued, if He had assumed the functions of God Himself, the reason was that the claim was justified; He really *was* by nature on an equality with God, though He stripped Himself of His glory, instead of parading it as a man might exhibit, yet cling to, a hardly-won prize (cp. Phil. ii. 6).

Does either interpretation follow from the occurrences in question? In order to answer that query, we must in the first place ask why the scribes and Pharisees were so much shocked by the words of Jesus—or rather why *they* were so particularly shocked. We have only to imagine the case of a Roman Catholic being asked whether a layman can validly pronounce absolution, and the blank negative with which he would meet such a query, in order to understand the situation. Just as only a duly ordained priest can absolve sinners, in virtue of the supernatural powers conferred upon him in ordination, so the Law laid down plain rules as to the

manner in which alone an Israelite could obtain the Divine pardon. He had to present himself before the priest, and to make a sin-offering, according to his means; "and the priest," we read, "shall make atonement for him as touching his sin that he has sinned in any of these things, and he shall be forgiven" (Lev. v. 13). Sin was a debt incurred against God, transgression of the Law; and absolution was to be obtained through the legal, official channel: "the priest shall make atonement for him as touching his sin, and he shall be forgiven." It is true that here and there in the writings of prophets and psalmists we come upon a protest against this theory of forgiveness by what amounted to a payment tendered to the priest; but in the day of our Lord the method and procedure in question were the accepted ones, invested with Divine sanction and authority. Yet in the two episodes just referred to, we see Jesus entirely ignoring this time-honoured practice, slighting the function of the priesthood, which was also a chief source of their income—in one word, proclaiming the possibility of salvation apart from the works of the Law, and without the offerings legally enjoined. That was the real scandal—that was the outrage in the eyes of the scribes and Pharisees—that this Rabbi made the mediation of the priest superfluous, dispensing with what the Law declared necessary; it was the priesthood that was in danger if this teaching became accepted! In charging Him with blasphemy because He presumed to wield the power of the Most High, the champions of the Law made use of a

disingenuous, but also a highly effective device for arousing prejudice against Him. As a matter of fact, it was not the prerogative of God, but the prerogative of the priest, which Jesus violated ; He had not said, "I forgive thee thy sins," but "Thy sins are forgiven." So did the priest, after he had received a more or less substantial offering : so did Jesus, after assuring Himself of the sinner's sincere sorrow and godly repentance. For the rest, it may be pointed out that the accusation which His enemies levelled against Him is quite characteristic; in all ages, when sacerdotalism or traditionalism has been attacked, the first—and, indeed, instinctive—move of sacerdotalists or traditionalists has been to suggest that God was being blasphemed. What shocked and angered the scribes and Pharisees beyond measure, was simply that a layman should have pronounced absolution.

In dealing with this subject, it cannot be too clearly understood that the root-idea of sin as a debt incurred by man against God was one which the popular religion of the Jews shared with the ancient world generally ; and this root-idea, too, is that which explains the function of the priesthood. Recourse is had to the priest, who is supposed to have a special knowledge of, and influence with, the offended Deity, and who can thus act as the effectual mediator and intercessor on the transgressor's behalf, the channel through whom a propitiatory offering may be made, so as to obtain a cancellation of the debt in due form. Such a view of sin and atonement is, of course, open to a variety of dangers.

## Had He Power to Forgive Sins?

To begin with, sin, thus regarded, is not necessarily interpreted as *moral* wrong, but merely as an infringement of external rules whose breach, whether purposive or accidental, entails punishment; indeed, the "sin" lies not in the motive, but in the outward act. Again, where pardon is thought to be obtainable on the payment of a price, the idea is bound to arise that it does not matter *who* makes that payment, so long as it is made; forgiveness thus loses its ethical character, while a Deity who pardons on such terms can be viewed as "righteous," or demanding "righteousness," only in the most external connotation of those terms. As sin may be compounded for by a *quid pro quo*, so forgiveness is regarded merely as an escape from evils which would otherwise overtake the transgressor; and thus the religious sentiment is tainted at its very core. This was the commercial, "transactional," theory of atonement which Jesus found in vogue among His contemporaries; against this conception He protested in word and deed, and never more emphatically than when He pronounced that formula of forgiveness which, according to the established views, none but a priest might use, after the requirements of the Law had been fulfilled.

II

Nevertheless it will be asked, and rightly—Granted that the priestly theory of atonement was erroneous, have we a true one to put in its place? Granted that the priest had no real authority to declare men's sins forgiven, what authority had Jesus to do so, and what is

His share in the forgiveness of sin? Let us realise, in approaching these questions, that the subject is one of extreme difficulty. To be ready with an easy explanation is to proclaim oneself shallow, and, incidentally, to insult the race; what has proved a painful central problem to age after age is assuredly not to be settled by an offhand solution tendered with jaunty confidence.

It is, indeed, matter for surprise that an age which professes to have grasped more firmly than any of its predecessors the inexorable sequence of cause and effect should feel any disposition to regard the subject of the forgiveness of sins as other than full of mystery. We do not nowadays think of sin as something separable from its effects; nor do we look upon forgiveness merely as being let off some deserved chastisement. We do not regard punishment as arbitrarily or vindictively inflicted upon the sinner, nor as something that may be arbitrarily remitted, but as the proper consequence of sin, the effect which is already implicitly contained in the cause. Moreover, while we feel that the sinner, in the act of sin, lets loose the forces which must work retribution upon himself, sin is to us perhaps less exclusively an affair between the individual soul and its God than to former thinkers; in estimating its consequences, we are inclined to dwell with greater emphasis upon the havoc which one man's sins work in other and innocent lives, and the consciousness of this complicates for us the problem of forgiveness very considerably. How is a man to be forgiven, we ask ourselves, while the consequences of his sins endure?

The truth surely was expressed by Bishop Westcott in the words: "Each act of man obviously goes on working, and working after its kind, in the doer and in his children's children. So it is also with thought and with feeling. The bad thought once admitted avenges itself by rising again unbidden and unwelcome. The bad feeling once indulged spreads through the whole character and gives birth to other like passions. Sin in every form is the violation of law, and law inexorably requires its penalty to the uttermost. . . . *To reason, if we are honest with ourselves, the great mystery of the future is not punishment but forgiveness.*"[1]

The analogy of human forgiveness will be invoked to prove that, since full and free pardon is a phenomenon of daily occurrence between man and man, there is no difficulty in conceiving of an equally free pardon being extended to man by God. But this analogy, while containing an element of truth, and providing a most significant hint towards the partial solution of our problem, does not itself help us to a solution which can be regarded as at all complete. Let us with all reverence take the most highly-wrought and beautiful of the parables of our Lord, the story of the prodigal son, and inquire what exactly took place. The prodigal, instead of being repulsed with harshness by his father, is received with open arms, and reinstated in that position in his father's affection which he had forfeited by his own fault; but can the father's love do more than this? Can it

[1] *The Historic Faith*, lect. x.

immediately restore the younger son's lost innocence, undo the moral deterioration he has undergone during his years of riot, efface from his mind shameful memories which will yet return and haunt him, or deliver him from the pangs of remorse that must be his when he reflects on the evil influence he has exercised upon others in those misspent years? Let us press the matter one step further: supposing the prodigal's extravagance had ruined the paternal estate, and the father's transport of grief and shame had brought on a paralytic seizure, there is nothing improbable in assuming that he would still have welcomed, still have forgiven the cause of all this misery; but could the prodigal, with the effects of his conduct ever before him, have forgiven himself? Nothing is more touching than the boundless generosity manifested by ill-used love towards those who have trodden it under foot; but it is as well that we should realise that there are limitations to what even such love can accomplish.

And yet this love can and does accomplish much; it arrests some part of the evil consequences of sin directly and at once, by returning good for ill; it saves the sinner from despair, making it easier for him to redeem himself; by treating him as worth saving, love gives him back the hope in the possibility of his being saved. There are limits to what the pardoning love of man can effect, but within these limits it is a real power unto salvation; on the other hand, a pitiless and unforgiving spirit aggravates what it condemns, by giving no hope of amendment, no room for repentance.

## Had He Power to Forgive Sins?

And now let us see how far this human analogy will carry us. Cannot God, it will be asked, pardon at least as fully and as freely as man? Perhaps, before entering upon this subject, we ought to stop and consider what sin means to God. We shall scarcely share the view of those who hold that the primary mischief of transgression consists in the insult done to God—as though He were an immensely-magnified Potentate, in whose eyes the greatest offence was that of *lèse-majesté*; on the other hand, if we believe in Him as a loving Father, we cannot think of Him as other than being hurt by our waywardness and wilful disobedience. How can a father help feeling the injuries his children inflict upon themselves and upon each other by their misdoings? What parent would not grieve if he saw a beloved child giving rein to some pernicious craving? Human sin cannot "insult" God's dignity; but it can stab His love. Nor can it be sanely alleged that He is indifferent to sin, or to conduct and character generally; the very consequences of sin are so many unmistakable warnings from Him, that its road is the road to destruction, and its wages is death. And if man suffers in all that is best within him as a consequence of the inevitable estrangement from God involved in sin, we may conceive that God Himself also grieves over that estrangement, and would have the breach healed by the sinner's return to Him. So far as this desire receives its fullest attestation and fulfilment in the Cross, that is a part of our subject which we must reserve for later treatment. In the present place it suffices to express

the reasonable conviction that God, as a Father, does wish for man's restoration, and is anxious to forgive him, if possible, and as far as possible.

God is anxious to forgive man, *if possible*. That is to say, His forgiveness, in order to be at all effectual, is conditioned by man's repentance. Man must turn *from* sin in order to turn *to* God. Man must at least desire to be redeemed ere he can be redeemed. This connection between forgiveness and repentance has to be strongly emphasised, as it is this which gives to the fact of God's pardon its ethical character; and by repentance is not meant the regret of the transgressor when he verifies for himself the axiom that the way he has chosen is hard and painful, but a godly sorrow and contrition which express themselves in conscious and strenuous endeavours after goodness. The Father is willing and ready to pardon the sinner, but the sinner must give proof of his earnest desire to co-operate with his Creator, before he can receive the blessing which is waiting for him. The forgiveness of the unrepentant is a contradiction in terms, and a psychological impossibility.

And God is anxious to forgive man, *as far as possible*. That is to say, we may think of Him as ready to blot out—just as human love is ready to do—all such offences as we have committed against Himself. He harbours, if we may use the language of accommodation, no resentment in respect of the hurt we have inflicted upon Him. Love asks for nothing better than reconciliation with the beloved; that he should heartily desire

to be received back is the sole and sufficient condition. But how can God forgive us the wrongs we have inflicted not upon Him, but upon our fellows—wrongs which may still be sending up their dreadful harvests? He is the loving Father of the wronged ones as well as of the wrong-doer; He is, moreover, the moral Governor, the righteous Judge of the world, and however gladly He may cancel all personal injuries, He cannot, consistently with justice, obliterate the evil in our record so far as it has stained or blighted other lives. If our greed or passion have brought misery and degradation into human hearts, if our harshness and want of charity have driven some storm-tossed soul to shipwreck, how are we to be forgiven the ills we have caused, though we repent in dust and ashes? Here we may well confess that we stand before a mystery which defies our powers of unravelling. We know that the moral law fulfils itself with the same unfaltering sureness as the laws which govern physical nature, yet the final redemption for which we crave means that a term shall be set to the consequences of sin. To call such a consummation "natural" or obvious is a sheer misuse of language, for the truth is that we can have no idea of the way by which such a goal is to be reached. Nevertheless, in forgiving the repentant sinner "as far as possible," generously cancelling the wrong and injury which man has inflicted upon Himself, God encourages man to go, and sin no more, to persevere in well-doing, and holds out the hope of an ultimate regeneration and restoration, when

"What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more."

With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

III

And now we may turn back to the question which we began by asking, *viz.*, What share—apart from His death on the Cross—has Jesus in the forgiveness of sins, and what authority has He to pronounce that forgiveness Himself?

The religion of Jesus Christ centred in, and radiated from, one thought, which filled Him altogether—the love of God. He realised that fact as no one had ever realised it before; He was its supreme embodiment, its living demonstration. And because God is Love, therefore sin was to Jesus the great tragedy of the soul, its wilful self-exile from God. With this conviction in His heart, He could not but find Himself in direct antagonism to the Pharisaic conception of sin as an offence against a written body of legal injunctions and ordinances—a view which made it sinful to violate, even though it might be unwittingly, some petty ceremonial prescription, but tolerated moral delinquency, hardness and equivocation, so long as the letter of the Law was observed. He shared neither the Pharisees' diagnosis of the disease, nor, *a fortiori*, their view of its remedy. Sin meant to Him the violation, not of a law of commandments contained in ordinances, but of the law of

love; it was rebellion against the will of God, which was always and only and altogether good. This was an infinitely more serious conception than the one with which it came into collision; sin, regarded as exclusion from God's presence, a voluntary dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death, was far too grave a malady to yield to surface treatment, nor could it be expelled by "offerings" on a sliding-scale graduated according to income. Sin, as viewed by Jesus, had its seat within, and men could not find happiness or contentment while sin kept them in alienation from God and His will. Being a Father, God could not but yearn for their reconciliation to Himself; but there was no other way for that end to be obtained, save through repentance and amendment. Thus it was by no accident that the first note of our Lord's message was "Repent—be ye of another mind." So long as the soul was hardened in evil, the whole process of salvation was at a standstill, and the soul itself in imminent danger of straying still further away from God and goodness. But our Lord never doubted that God was both mighty and willing to save. That such an end could not be achieved through the solemn trivialities of a soulless ceremonial, Jesus felt convinced; His soul thrilled responsive to the words of the psalmist—"Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I am come." The soul must "come"; the man must of his own free will cease to do evil, and learn to

do well; if the wicked would forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return to the Lord, God would have mercy, and abundantly pardon.

So far, the thought of Jesus on these great subjects was a return from the barren externalism of the Law to the golden age of His nation's religion, just as in His emphasis upon repentance He seemed merely to echo the Baptist's message. But it was one thing to discern and proclaim the true road towards reconciliation and forgiveness, and quite another to induce men to walk in it. John had thundered repentance in the people's ears, and awed them; but John was an angry prophet after the pattern of Amos: he did not make them feel God's willingness to receive them back, because his own righteousness was bleak and forbidding, unlighted by love. Never was "the difference between man and man" more strikingly displayed, or the maxim *Quum duo faciunt idem, non est idem* more signally verified, than in this instance. John and Jesus both preached repentance—yet with what utter disparity of effect! And the reason is not far to seek; for Jesus, while stern towards sin, was gentle towards the sinner—He never lost sight of the brother or sister in the erring child of God, and desired men's deliverance from sin more than He condemned them for having yielded to its allurements. He had compassion on the multitude, whom He saw as sheep without shepherd. With His deep insight, He knew how pathetically easy it is for men to miss and lose their way in this labyrinth of a world—and He was

come to seek and to save that which was lost. Withal, He never doubted of the soul of goodness in men, however sunken and degraded, just as He never doubted God's desire to pardon them; and herein lay His wonderful power with sinners. He made goodness appear worth striving for and possible of attainment, persuading poor wayward men and women to believe that He who is the Source of all goodness was ready to welcome them, without ritual or offering or priestly intervention, if they would only turn to Him. He gave them back their faith in themselves as well as in God; He told the outcast and forlorn, who shivered beneath the world's frown, that God wished them nothing but good; that, in spite of all that happened, they could repent, and God would forgive. And when He, who knew what was in man, saw the signs of true repentance, of heartfelt contrition, then He had no hesitation in saying, "Your sins are forgiven." So He spoke to the sick man who was let down through the roof in Capernaum; so He spoke to the woman who had been a sinner, in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

It is a noteworthy circumstance that in both these cases special mention is made of *faith* as a determining factor in the deliverance that is wrought and recorded. Where there was no faith in the power of Jesus to heal diseases, there we have seen that it was practically impossible for Him to effect cures; and only to those who had a similar faith in His moral and spiritual authority could He impart the assurance of Divine

forgiveness. As He says to a sufferer whom He has restored, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," so He tells this woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." But that which distinguished Him from others was just the gift of awakening or resuscitating faith; sinners who had despaired of themselves, and given up striving, took new hope when they came into contact with the Son of man. The dreary ceremonialisms of the priests did not satisfy them, nor did they feel forgiven when some temple official had mechanically pronounced the formula of absolution. But in Jesus there was that which inspired a fresh confidence in all things good; and when He had told some repentant soul the good news of the Father's pardon, such a one went away comforted, inwardly assured that this forgiveness was real and effectual, with a fresh hope in his heart, and resolved to live a new life.

But as soon as we say this, we shall be met with the query, asked more insistently than ever—How was He in a position to give such assurances at all, or what difference can it make to one man that another pronounces his offences to be pardoned? We remember Macbeth's question to the physician whom he consults upon the distraught condition of the queen:

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?"

to which the physician replies,

> "Therein the patient
> Must minister to himself."

But that, to many, perhaps to most, in such a condition, would be a doctrine of sheer despair. To tell men that these are matters in which they are perforce thrown on their own resources, and that no third person is able to help them—that Chamfort's famous aphorism concerning happiness, which he described as difficult to find in ourselves, and impossible to find elsewhere, applied equally to forgiveness—would be a message of doom to many whose consciences know much of self-accusation, but little or nothing about self-pardon. It is of no use to deprecate these ineffectual agonisings, these wild self-reproaches for things past and gone, the terrible remorse which makes men toss about on sleepless beds—no use to bid them desist from experiencing such feelings by describing them as "morbid": suppose they are, suppose these are sick souls, it has still to be remembered that the business of the physician is not simply to say "You are sick," but to heal. It does not require very much wisdom to tell wasting disease from the bloom of health; the problem is to effect a cure. How is this to be done? How are those to be relieved who cannot escape from their past, cannot forgive themselves?

We shall find a valuable clue towards the solution of this dark enigma in the treatment it received at the hands of the greatest dramatic genius of Greece, who

shows us a soul in the grip of such endless remorse for a deed of terror; from land to land, a fugitive from the avenging Furies, Orestes roams, until at length, haunted by the "grey, snake-locked faces," he arrives in Athens, and there obtains at the hands of his fellow-men the absolution which he could not grant himself. In the form of a moving play, and with the help of much mythological apparatus, Æschylus here brings us face to face with a most important truth; for we are not unrelated atoms, fulfilling our individual destinies apart from our fellow-men, but their judgment deeply and inevitably affects our judgment of ourselves. Here we see the value—together with the corresponding danger—of public opinion. A healthy public opinion will do more to stamp out some form of moral evil than a legislative enactment which is not supported by the general verdict. In the last resort, few of us are so independent—all rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding—but that our estimate of ourselves is sensibly influenced by the estimate of some other or others. It is deeply significant that the compassionate verdict of the Areopagus should give Orestes the peace that had fled him for years.

But what, we may ask, would have become of Orestes if the Areopagus had decided against him? What does become of many who, having once been caught tripping, having once listened to temptation, and paid the penalty, are declared virtual outlaws by society? Every one knows of cases of this description, where it has been rendered practically impossible for men, owing to the

harsh judgment of their fellows, to rise up again from the mire into which they have once fallen; met everywhere by censorious glances, eyed with suspicion and disapproval, how frequently such victims of one false step have been known to sink back into the life of sin and shame from which they would fain have escaped, had not society silently decreed that there should be no return or restoration for such as themselves. No wonder that, with the distance between themselves and goodness steadily increasing, they lose heart more and more, until even repentance dies to all appearance in their breast, and its place is taken by a numb wonder that it should be so—as who should say,

> "Well, this cold clay clod
> Was man's heart!"

We have to remember that persistence—even enforced persistence—in wrong-doing is inevitably destructive of the power, the hope, and finally the desire to turn back. A first fault may plunge the sinner into an agony of grief; but custom will dull the edge of remorse, depriving him more and more of the power to feel godly sorrow, till such a man may at length stand by the corpse of his own higher self, dreadfully sober but with tearless eyes —one whom it is apparently "impossible to renew again unto repentance." It is by despairing of men's redemption that society manufactures too many of its desperate and irredeemable characters. To be labelled and classed as a "sinner," and to be given to understand that one's

touch brings pollution, is hardly an incitement to seek the things that are above.

It may be thought that these remarks have little direct bearing upon our subject; as a matter of fact, it will presently be seen that they are strictly germane to it. For if it is possible for human unkindliness and Pharisaism to render the burden of guilt insupportable, to make the sinner feel that he is past forgiveness, it is surely possible for human love and sympathy to lighten that load, and to induce a less despondent frame of mind. If the harshness of the world's judgment may utterly crush the transgressor, depriving him of all hope and initiative, the goodwill and insight of some heaven-sent friend may as effectively produce a sense of relief in the tortured heart, such as the individual could not have drawn from himself. Just at a time when uncharitable condemnation thunders its verdict of despair into an unfortunate man's ear, someone with a deeper spiritual discernment, and a truer knowledge of the great Heart of God, may whisper the comforting words, "Your sins are forgiven—live or die in peace." And experience shows that it is not God's holy ones who deal most severely with their erring brethren; as a prophecy for whose fulfilment common men and women may well pray, few words are more hopeful than Paul's "The saints shall judge the world."

One man, then, may communicate to another a sense of the forgiveness of sins, allaying pangs of remorse, bringing a fresh peace, a fresh hope, into a brother's

heart. One man may be to another a messenger of Divine pardon, exercising a ministry of reconciliation. Impossible though it may be, in Dr. Edwin Abbott's words, "to define or limit too precisely the extent to which one human being may have the power of imparting to another an actual lightening or remission of the burden of sin," yet, as the same writer points out, "this power of forgiving, however indefinable and inexplicable, remains a fact."[1] We are far from saying that this power is common; but that it exists in those who are intimately acquainted with God and man, cannot be doubted.

And now at length it will become apparent how supremely justified Jesus was whenever He gave to some poor penitent mortal the comforting message "Thy sins are forgiven." Let it be understood that He exercised a privilege based on unrivalled insight and understanding. Because He was in the Father, and the Father in Him, so that He knew and proclaimed the Father's mind unerringly; because He lived so close to men, knowing their trials, their failures, their endeavours, their motives, their sorrows, He could announce the Divine pardon in sure and convincing tones to some whom the world scorned and held lost. The men and women to whom He spoke the word, knew themselves for sinners as they had never done before; but, in the very act of repenting, they also knew themselves as possible objects of salvation. He who was able to make them

[1] *Apologia*, p. 7.

feel sorry and ashamed, melting the hard crust of selfishness, was able also to make those who yielded themselves to His influence feel forgiven, when no one else could have conveyed that assurance to them. The battered, the sin-stained, those upon whose brows life had written the legend "failure" for all the unpitying world to read, heard His call, and something within them, a chord no other voice had been able to set vibrating, thrilled responsive. As they listened to Him, they felt assured by something deeper than all argument that He spoke with authority, and not as the scribes—that He absolved them from their sins effectually, and not as the priests. A patient might be cured of some physical infirmity, and forget the one who had so ministered to him; but no one could be healed from deadly sickness of the soul without for ever remembering and loving the Saviour who had done such a mighty work by him. The saying, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much," must not be misunderstood as though it meant that the bestowal of the pardon was the reward of the woman's love; on the contrary, her love is her soul's response to the pardon which has come to her through Christ. "We love Him, because He first loved us."

But when we have thus answered our query, "Had He power to forgive sins?" in the affirmative, we have by no means finished with our subject; we have, indeed, done little more than provide a basis, a point of departure. For the question which we have been discussing

has a much wider than merely historical bearing; we have not reached our final conclusion when we have decided that Jesus had power and authority to pronounce men's sins forgiven nineteen hundred years ago, in the days of His flesh. The paramount fact for the Christian to lay hold of is rather this, that the experience of forgiveness with God through Christ is open to all to-day, on the same, unaltered conditions as those held out of old. His work is not over, His commission has never been revoked. We must have faith enough to accept Him as our Lord, to submit ourselves to His rule, to believe in the love of God which He reveals, as stronger than the bonds of sin and death. He has the power, if we will test it, to *cause* our sins to be forgiven, by awakening in us the spirit of repentance, by making us desire to turn our backs upon the famine-country of self-pleasing, and to set our feet on the homeward path which leads to the Father's house. While man can repent, God will forgive; and armed with the sense of this forgiveness, imperfect men may strive and pray for that full and final redemption when all discords will be resolved by God, "and great shall be the peace of His children." Christ's offer of pardon is open to us *now*. "Come unto Me," He calls, "all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This is an invitation, not only to the sorrowing, but to the sinner; who that believes it, would refuse it?

## CHAPTER V

### IS BELIEF IN HIM NECESSARY TO SALVATION?

### I

THE question before us is one that has reverberated through the Christian centuries, answered by a chorus of affirmation in which there mingles scarcely a dissentient voice. "What must I do to be saved?" is the question of the Philippian gaoler to Paul and Silas, as he prostrates himself at their feet. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved," is the unhesitating reply. We shall hardly be guilty of misinterpretation if we say at once that the meaning in which salvation has been understood by the great majority of Christians has been predominantly, if not exclusively, that of a *present* assurance of *future* deliverance or immunity from ills which must otherwise befall them.

We meet with a classical instance of this belief, presented on the largest scale, in Dante's great epic of the soul; for while the poet and his guide are still in the outer courts of the City of Woe, and before as yet they have started on their pilgrimage through the narrowing circles of the dolorous realms, where they will see all kinds of sinners in everlasting torments, their ears are

assailed by a sound of multitudinous wailings that make the air tremble—unceasing moans from innumerable infants, men and women. Who are these, and what sin deserving such a fate have they committed? The poet's guide explains, answering the question he reads in his companion's eye—

> "Know thou, they never sinned, nor young nor old;
> And yet this merit wrought for them no meed,
> Since baptism they all lacked, the doorway of your creed."

Born before Christianity, or never brought under its influence, they could not worship God aright; and for this misfortune they were one and all eternally lost, shut out from the presence of God, though they suffered no actual physical pain, but only a hopeless longing. Homer was there, and Socrates, and Plato, with many another great and noble spirit; and Dante was seized by an agony of sorrow, for he knew their worthiness, who were nevertheless among the lost, excluded from heaven and salvation for ever.

The picture is one which certainly provokes reflection. Here are wisdom, virtue, high character, even the innocence of babes, yet none of these availed their possessors to procure their escape from an unending hell; the mere fact that these were the souls of non-Christians, that they had never received baptism, sealed their final and irrevocable doom. Dante might grieve over such a hard fate; yet he, with his mighty mind, never doubted that those who had not heard of the Gospel, nor been received into the Church, could not partake of salvation.

And the dogma of the Catholic Church, to which he thus unreservedly, albeit reluctantly, bows, is not one whit more emphatic than the statement in Acts, attributed to Peter : " In none other is there salvation ; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." The words may or may not be Peter's ; what really matters, and what suffers no doubt, is that they represent the belief of the early Church, and that their meaning was distinctly eschatological. So intense was this conviction, *i.e.*, that only belief in Jesus, only baptism in His name, opened the gates of heaven, that in quite primitive times men began to suffer from it, and endeavoured to find an escape from its implications. It would have been strange had it been otherwise. A man would forsake the pagan cults, embrace the new faith, and feel assured of his own salvation accordingly ; but presently he would remember his dead parents, or some dear child that had been taken from him, or some much-loved friend who had departed this life in the darkness of paganism, and the question inevitably rose to his mind whether these were lost for ever because they had died without the opportunity of accepting Christ. The thought was intolerable ; heaven itself would not be heaven with the knowledge that they were in hell !

We have, in our New Testament, two distinct hints of the way in which this problem weighed upon the early believers, and of the solutions they devised to meet it. One of these occurs in 1 Cor. xv. 29, where

# Is Belief in Him Necessary?

Paul, in arguing in favour of the resurrection of the dead, makes use of the puzzling phrase: "Else what shall they do that are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptised for them?" While the obscurity of this verse, and its apparent irrelevance to the general argument—for it "neither proves the resurrection nor points to any evil results from disbelieving it" (Drummond)—has given rise to "some thirty suggested solutions," some of them fantastic and laboured in the extreme, the most reasonable interpretation seems to be that believers underwent baptism vicariously on behalf of their dead friends, with the idea that the rite would benefit them and procure for them the salvation they had only missed by dying too soon.[1] Crude and mechanical as we may deem such a notion, we can hardly fail to be touched by the human affection which suggested such a desperate expedient.

Yet another remedy suggested itself in connection with the belief in the resurrection of our Lord. If He rose again on the third day after the crucifixion, then, it was contended, logically enough from the point of

[1] Dr. Massie seems too absolute in declaring that what the apostle alludes to "cannot be any semi-superstitious custom observed here and there by some who got themselves baptised lest their friends who had died without baptism should thereby be losers at the coming of Christ." (Century Bible, *I and II Corinthians*, p. 40) Why "cannot"? Dr. Massie would also appear mistaken in saying that "no such custom is known before the time of Tertullian;" Tertullian refers to the custom as practised in Paul's time, not as being in vogue in his own age. Cp. Dr. Armitage Robinson, *s.v.* "Baptism," *Enc. Bib.*, i. 473, note.

view of the accepted cosmology, He must in the meantime have descended into Hades, the interim habitation of departed souls prior to the general resurrection; what more natural than to think that He occupied that interval by announcing the Gospel to these, thus giving them the opportunity they had not had on earth? Accordingly we read in the first Epistle of Peter that "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison," and that "the Gospel was preached even unto the dead;" and in one of those apocryphal writings which had a great vogue in their time, the second-century so-called Gospel of Nicodemus, there is a graphic account of Christ's descent into Hades and His ministry there, culminating in the resurrection of the righteous dead, their baptism in Jordan and entry into paradise.[1] Love will find a way of triumphing over a harsh dogma, even when that dogma is fully accepted.

But while freely acknowledging the humane and tender feelings which inspired these ingenuities of faith, of the doctrine itself whose full rigour they are intended to mitigate—the doctrine which declared salvation to be confined to those who believed in Jesus, and consigned all who did not believe in Him to eternal doom—we can only say that we reject it without hesitation. We need not stay to criticise those early adherents to the

[1] Cp. also the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (100—130 A.D.), where we read, after the Saviour's issuing forth from the tomb, followed by a Cross: "And they heard a voice from heaven, saying, Didst Thou preach to them that sleep? And a response was heard from the Cross, Yea."

Gospel, who were so filled with the sense of the blessedness which had come into their lives through Christ that the very intensity of the light in which they moved threw everything outside the illumined area into unrelieved darkness; we remember, moreover, that the world which they inhabited was small and of few days compared with that revealed to our completer knowledge. At the same time, our enlarged conceptions of the world, the antiquity of man, and the number of the race, make it simply impossible for us to acquiesce in the implications of a belief which former ages unquestioningly accepted. What are these implications? Briefly stated they are these—that if "in none other is there salvation, neither is there any other name in which we must be saved," then all who lived before Christ are lost; the immense majority of those who have lived since Christ are lost; five-sixths of humanity living at the present moment are certainly lost, even if we postulate that all nominal Christians are certainly saved. And hence there follows the further implication, that even God's supreme expedient—the mission, teaching and death of Christ—has been all but an utter failure, since it has succeeded in rescuing only an exiguous portion of the race from the doom involved in the catastrophe of the Fall.

It may not be quite useless to follow this thought out a step further. We know that the belief in the awful consummation in store for all non-Christians has in times past been an immense incentive to missionary zeal, a powerful motive which sent forth brave and

tender spirits to preach Christ to savage races, risking danger, privation, torture, manifold death, "that they might by all means save some." But in honouring their memory, and rejoicing in their valiant love which made them more than conquerors, we cannot fail to realise, if we reflect at all, that the story of their self-forgetting labours, undertaken with such a conception of the fate of the unbaptised, is nothing less—to say it reverently—than a tremendous vote of censure on God. On the theory which we are discussing, God is willing that unnumbered myriads of souls should come into the world simply to suffer eternal perdition, for He has made no adequate provision for their salvation ; all is left to the feeble efforts of men, whose compassion in seeking to stem the flood of everlasting woe far outruns the compassion of God. If it were really true that only those can be saved who have accepted Christianity in some form or other, if all the hundreds of millions of Buddhists, Mohammedans, Confucians, or even idolaters of every variety, are simply lost, then we could only register our protest against the world's misgovernment, and abandon ourselves to despair. If a crowded passenger-boat, overtaken by storm in mid-ocean, and about to become a total wreck, were found in that hour of extremity to be short of all life-saving apparatus, we should speak of the lack of foresight responsible for such defective equipment as simply criminal ; but what words would describe our feelings if such a boat had been sent out in an unseaworthy condition, deliberately under-equipped, to meet

certain disaster, from which only a few of its living freight could escape? Yet is not the world just such a "coffin-ship," according to the older theory of salvation?

Realising the full and literal meaning of the doctrine under review in a way in which the early Christians could not realise it, we have no choice but to refuse it belief; we reject it, because it is dishonouring to God. That attitude implies no want of respect towards the Saviour, nor desire to rob Him of His unique position; but in believing unreservedly His teaching of the Fatherhood of God, we cannot also believe that the same Father has foredoomed the majority of His children to eternal loss, by laying down conditions of salvation impossible for all but a minority to avail themselves of. Neither will we pay the Son of God the mock-honour of declaring that all who do not believe in Him will be shut out from God's mercy—nay, from God's justice—for ever, remembering that when the question of how to obtain eternal life was propounded to Him, He pointed to quite a different standard: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. This do, and thou shalt live."

## II

But in dealing with a belief, especially one that has been held so fervently as this, we have never done more than touch the fringe of the subject when we have

stated that it does not satisfy us; if we have shown good reason for coming to that conclusion, there still remains the greater question to be answered as to how this belief originated, and what is the truth underlying it? How came men to feel that "this is His (*i.e.*, God's) commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"? (1 John iii. 23). What is the experience which finds expression in the words "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? A real and profound experience there must have been, or the words would never have been uttered; and that experience must have verified itself over and over again in the Christian consciousness, or men would have repudiated ere now a doctrine which had failed to waken a response in their hearts. In order to understand the relation between belief in Christ and salvation, we shall have to inquire anew into the meaning of both these terms.

Salvation, as we have already seen, has been too frequently regarded in a more or less exclusively eschatological sense, or as a *present* assurance of *future* immunity from ill; popularly, salvation is perhaps still predominantly interpreted as equivalent to deliverance from the consequences of sin. The truer meaning, assuredly, is deliverance *from sin*, and its dominion over us. Sin is the soul's tragedy; it is that which throws man's true relation to God out of gear, changing harmony into discord, and is utterly incompatible with peace or joy, luring man with spurious promises of both to seek his

happiness in the wrong direction. We cannot do better than quote the language of the *Theologia Germanica:*

"But what then is there which is contrary to God and hateful to Him? Nothing but Sin. But what is Sin? Mark this: Sin is nothing else than that the creature willeth otherwise than God willeth, and contrary to Him. . . . Therefore all will apart from God's will (that is, all self-will) is sin, and so is all that is done from self-will. So long as a man seeketh his own will and his own highest Good, because it is *his*, and for his own sake, he will never find it; for so long as he doeth this, he is not seeking his own highest Good, and how then should he find it? For so long as he doeth this, he seeketh himself, and dreameth that he is himself the highest Good; and seeing that he is not the highest Good, he seeketh not this so long as he seeketh himself. . . . It hath been said, that there is of nothing so much in hell as of self-will. The which is true, for there is nothing else there than self-will, and if there were no self-will, there would be no Devil and no hell. When it is said that Lucifer fell from Heaven, and turned away from God, and the like, it meaneth nothing else than that he would have his own will, and would not be at one with the Eternal Will."

While sin itself persists, its consequences must of necessity follow; and even if the consequences were suspended or annulled, yet so long as sin itself holds sway in a heart, and the man remains self-centred and bent upon accomplishing his self-will, that reconciliation with God which is what we mean by salvation is as far off as ever. To be saved is to be at one with God; whereas sin not only hinders that blessed condition from realising itself, but is its effective negation. In seeking its "own," sin is the antithesis of love—essentially egoistic, individualistic, as unfilial as it is unfraternal; in

its mistaken emphasis on self, it cuts self off from God, which is as though a leaf-bud, eager to assert its own individuality, were violently to sever its connection with the tree on which it grew—with the inevitable consequence that the tree's sap could no longer flow into and nourish the bud that preferred its "independence" in the mire to life on the tree. Now, while man can never cut himself finally loose from God as a bud might be cut from its tree, and while man's communion with God can be restored, as the relation of the bud to the tree cannot, the consequences are analogous in both cases. The consequences of sin cannot be made undone while the cause remains—the symptoms cannot disappear so long as the disease is in the system. The only salvation which counts is salvation from sin, the soul's return from self to God.

In describing sin as both unfilial and unfraternal, we have already pointed to its twofold character, and foreshadowed the twofold process of salvation. In so far as sin is an offence against God, it is a practical denial of man's sonship; in so far as it is a wrong done to others, it is a practical denial of brotherhood: to which, doubtless, it might be added that in so far as it reacts upon the doer, it is simply suicidal. Now, we have seen in our last chapter that in our Lord's view the first and paramount, indeed, the only condition required of God for the bestowal of His pardon, is the sinner's sincere repentance, shown in a resolute turning away from his sin. God, being a Father, asks no more than the substitution of the filial for the unfilial disposition, in order to grant the

repentant sinner renewed access to His heart. His love does not remember the wrongs inflicted upon Himself—He exacts no reparation for the affronts that have been offered to Him ; He is satisfied with man's renewed faith in Him, as manifested by his penitence, and the moment the latter becomes real, the sense of Divine forgiveness may be experienced, antecedently to works, as the cause precedes the effect. This is the sense in which the contrite publican in the parable "went down to his house *justified*"—*justus factus*, in the Augustinian sense, "made just," restored to a just disposition—not because he had as yet, Zacchæus-like, made restitution of what he had wrongfully exacted, but because the humility of his confession, the consciousness of his need, and the sincerity of his faith, had obtained for him the mercy he implored.

But while God in His fatherly loving-kindness will on the manifestation of such signs as these, cancel by the exercise of His free grace, and without other "merit" on our part, the guilt we have incurred against Himself, He cannot, having regard to His justice, hold us guiltless in respect of the wrong which we have done to others, and which repentance alone cannot obliterate. The process of salvation, therefore, while beginning in justification, or the renewal of a right spirit, needs to be continued and completed in sanctification, a change of character, in which the principle of self-giving takes the place of self-seeking, and the ideal is no longer indulgence of appetite or gratification of self, but simply unselfish service prompted by love. When we say that a new

principle must be acknowledged, a new ideal pursued, we wish to bring out the fact that this process of sanctification must of necessity be gradual, involving as it does the formation of new habits, such as cannot but be difficult to acquire. We may "cease to do evil" in an instant; we must "learn to do well" in a life-time. The main consideration, however, is that the process should be taking place at all—not that we should have reached a certain goal, but that we should be moving in a certain direction (Phil. iii. 12). Indeed, the reality of the first of the experiences of which we are speaking will inevitably be tested by the results it produces or fails to produce—whether, that is to say, a new life of self-consecration and endeavour after goodness follows upon the sense of acceptance with God. Our power to make actual restitution may be very circumscribed; but salvation, in order to be a reality, involves of necessity a resolute turning from egoism, which is the negation of brotherliness, to altruism, which is its affirmation—it must have an ethical as well as a religious aspect, and right relations between man and man must attest that right relations between man and God have been re-established.

Having thus returned an answer to the first of our questions, *viz.*, as to the nature of salvation, we are now in a position to ask in what way this end is brought about by belief in Jesus. If we grasp the truth that the only thing from which we can need to be saved is the power of sin, we shall find our Lord's function as Saviour specified in the fewest possible words when we read that

"He was manifested to take away sins." He, in whom was no sin, came to challenge sin's dominion, to invade its realm, to diminish its power, by setting up a stronger and more enduring attraction to goodness. He reinforced the power of goodness in such a manner as to secure its victory over its dark rival. The microbe of disease, moral as well as physical, thrives and is multiplied in a vitiated, miasma-laden air; but Jesus brought into the ethical and spiritual atmosphere of the world a new and inexhaustible supply of health-giving ozone in which sin breathes and maintains itself with difficulty. Where the atmosphere is pervaded by the Christ-spirit, sin cannot live. By His precepts, by His example, by His Personality, He gave a new impulse to holiness; and the momentum of that impulse, so far from becoming spent, has steadily increased from His day to our own. He showed sin in its true colours, in its ugliness and deadliness; but, above all, He showed forth love in all its compelling power, by exhibiting it in Himself in purest, highest perfection. He persuaded men who were almost despairing of the struggle, that they might triumph in it, seeing that He had achieved triumph; He persuaded sinners that they were worth saving, that they could free themselves from the toils of sin if they tried. He brought God nigh unto man; He brings man nigh unto God.

III

To say so much is practically to have defined by implication the sense in which it is necessary for us to

"believe" in Jesus, in order to participate in the benefits which He came to bestow. But just as it is still necessary to deprecate a conception of salvation which does not rise above the level of an escape from some final doom incurred for us by the transgression of Adam, so it is still not altogether superfluous to utter a warning and to enter a protest against an allied conception of belief—especially as affecting salvation—which lays all the emphasis upon intellectual assent to a number of historical and metaphysical statements. We have, in other words, still to guard against that confusion between belief *in* Jesus and beliefs *about* Him, which has been the source of untold mischief and misery in the history of the Christian Church; which has erected standards of fellowship, and sanctioned exclusions and persecutions, utterly foreign to the mind of Christ.

Of course, assuming that we could be lost for so irrational a reason as our unhappy share in the consequences of the Fall, we might conceivably be saved by so irrational an expedient as "belief" in a series of propositions of the order described above; the one irrationality would simply balance, and in a certain sense redress, the other. Certainly the Churches have almost without exception made *beliefs* rather than *belief* obligatory on all those who would enter their respective communions, thus declaring that those who could not repeat their formulas could not claim the name of Christians, nor *a fortiori* partake of salvation. The Church, says a modern writer, "asks, and it is entitled to ask, the critic: Do you

believe in the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ? If he replies in the negative, he has missed the way, and has put himself outside the Church of Christ."[1]

But we fail to see how opinions, right or wrong, concerning the manner of Christ's birth and the phenomena following after His death, can save us, in the sense in which we have defined salvation, *viz.*, as deliverance from sin. It is surely possible, unless experience is strangely mistaken, to be intellectually convinced of the truth of these particular beliefs, and yet to lie open to moral reproach; and an opinion which cannot deliver from sin cannot save a man, however accurate it may be in itself. It does not seem to follow that a man is made better, purer, or holier— it does not follow that he receives the mind of Christ—because he has convinced himself that the two dogmas in question rest upon adequate historical evidence; nor does there appear to be any particular merit in accepting them without such evidence. If salvation means the approval of a God conceived as supremely good, then we cannot imagine the connection between that approval and the holding of certain views on a number of historical problems. It is a welcome sign of the times to find this simple truth vigorously driven home by Dr. Horton, in words like the following: "Nothing is

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 8—a work to which we may be pardoned for applying a description its author gives of another volume referred to by him as "strenuously orthodox and interesting for its boldness and ingenuity, though somewhat marred by a spirit of scorn and defiance." (*Ibid.*, p. 21.)

more barren than to say that we are saved by believing in the Divinity of Christ. Such a belief does not, and cannot, save. . . . . A man may believe in the Divinity of Christ, and yet not be a Christian at all; while a man may be a Christian, and not yet have reached the confession of Christ's Divinity, though, of course, he is on the way to the discovery."[1]

We venture to think that belief in Jesus is not only something quite different from beliefs about Him, but that it is at once very much simpler and very much harder than it has frequently been represented—easier to grasp, harder to practise. While no one would seek to banish mystery from religion, it should be said with all plainness that there is nothing mysterious, nothing unfathomable, nothing that transcends the reason, about the belief of which we are speaking. It is neither to be reached by the intellectual acumen of a hierarchy of *literati*, nor is it attained to in rare moments of mystic rapture and "supersensual" vision, nor yet communicated in some esoteric rite of initiation; but to believe in Jesus is simply to follow Him. If there are any to whom metaphysical speculations, intellectual subtleties or, maybe, mere assent to articles devised by others, are more congenial than the following of the Master, we have yet to reiterate and re-emphasise the plain truth that belief in Jesus, especially saving belief, means just to obey His invitation, "Follow Me." It seems strange that so elementary a point should need to be laboured, but it has

[1] *My Belief*, pp. 96—98.

to be confessed that belief has too often been represented as something in which practice had but a small part. To take the most obvious illustration, it would be a curious manifestation of belief in an Alpine guide to express perfect confidence in his experience—and to let him make the ascent by himself. He will show us the path, he will go before us, pointing out the best way of overcoming difficulties, he will warn us against rash steps into which our inexperience might have led us; he will ease us at times of our burdens by taking them upon himself, and his cheery courage and trained endurance will hearten us when the climb grows exhausting and the summit seems to be no nearer; but he cannot make the ascent *for* us. If we believe in him, we shall follow him; in a case of imminent danger, if we will implicitly obey his instructions, co-operating with his efforts, he will do his utmost to save us, risking his life for ours; but if we lack confidence in him, how can his experience or his bravery avail us? It is not otherwise with faith in Jesus; we are saved by faith in Him, just so far as faith becomes the starting-point of works, the incentive to discipleship, so far as it issues in the spirit of that scribe who said unto Him, "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." We may distinguish between faith and works in thought, and for purposes of exact reasoning, but any antithesis between them is unnatural and mischievous; they are not antithetical but complementary to each other, standing in the same relation as cause and effect. And we simply do

not believe in the existence of a cause which does not manifest itself in effects.

We repeat explicitly that to believe in a leader is not to accept a number of biographical details concerning him, but to follow his lead, to obey his commands ; yet how great is the difference, amongst those who would be leaders, as regards the power to awaken enthusiasm, to inspire attachment, to command belief ! Here and there in the world's history there arises someone who wields this gift, who walks among men as a king by right Divine, and claims them as his willing subjects, in virtue of a personality to which they instinctively pay their tribute. Now, as we remarked in a previous chapter, that which distinguished Jesus from all others was just this gift, which He possessed in an unparalleled degree, of arousing the faculty of faith in men's breasts ; and that faith was primarily faith in Himself. The superabundance of the Divine within Him, the presence of God manifest in the flesh, stirred the slumbering God-like in men, even while they themselves might be quite unable to account for the strange dominion which He exercised over their hearts and minds and wills. But belief in Himself meant a renewed belief in goodness, belief in possibilities that had never dawned upon men's thoughts, or suffered tragic eclipse. He had come to seek and to save ; He had the keen eye, the persuasive and reassuring voice, the magic and the magnetism which inspired new hope and drew men's souls to Him in wondering gratitude and love. It was not impossible, of course, nor is it now, to resist the

Divine spell of His personality, to refuse Him belief, even to range oneself in deliberate opposition to Him, for men are not automata ; but that He possessed, and still possesses, the power of commanding men's belief in a unique and unrivalled measure, is simply matter of history and experience. To listen to His appeal, to believe in Him, is to forsake the allurements of sin ; it is to be brought to God in filial love and obedience ; it is to be saved. "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name."

It has already been shown that Jesus consciously set Himself in the first place to call men to be "of a different mind," *i.e.*, to repent; but if He did so, it was because He discerned, as no one else did, behind and above the poor and sordid actual in man, his heavenward potentialities. His very call to repentance is a call of encouragement, bidding those whom it reaches to believe again in their own powers and their own destinies; to tell men to forsake their sins is to assure them implicitly that they can do so—it is, in that measure, tantamount to showing that belief in them and their capacities which is the surest means of resuscitating their belief in themselves. And yet we must not imagine that our Lord's dealing with sin was at all lacking in wholesome sternness, or that His treatment of transgressors erred on the side of that enervating sentimentality which makes the sinner feel an interesting object of compassion rather than of plain and weighty

rebuke. Nothing was further from Jesus than to minister to that faculty of self-deception which enables men to find excuses for their wrong-doings, and melts them in self-pity when they ought to be consumed in self-loathing. The first effect of His appearance is always and inevitably to discover to men their imperfections, to strip away the flimsy disguises which conceal the truth from their own eyes—in a word, to make them know themselves for sinners. And this applies not only to those whose moral delinquencies are fairly patent, and pointed to as such by the world, but to all false self-complacencies, to the self-satisfaction which, because of its own low ideals, utters the impious prayer: "I thank Thee that I am not as the rest of men." To those scribes of whom we read that they were made disciples of the kingdom, the revelation brought by the Lord must have come as a severe and wholly unexpected shock: they might understand publicans and sinners and harlots standing in need of repentance, but they themselves surely belonged to the respectable classes! To be told that, unless they repented, even these outcasts should go into the kingdom of God before them, was a hard lesson: no wonder that many among their number passionately resented and rebelled against it!

But it is not enough to say that Jesus insisted upon repentance by preaching it; His very presence rebuked sin, it accused and shamed sinners; it rendered men and women painfully conscious of disobedience to the highest, of unfaithfulness to what they already knew to

be the right, of evil impulses to which they had yielded. And yet they were not repelled by the Man who brought them this unwelcome self-knowledge, who convicted them of unworthiness by His own dimly-guessed exceeding worth, and by the exaltation of His teaching and example; they *believed* in Him, and for that very reason repented—they thought of their sins with a new and poignant regret which, deepening into anguish of soul, prostrated them before the Eternal, with the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." In that act of faith, so boldly humble, urging no claim, but trusting absolutely in the pardoning love of the Father, the soul leaps in a moment the abyss which separates it from God, and in a moment receives that assurance of mercy which it seeks; the interrupted communion is restored, and the life of God once more communicates itself to His child, working in him and inspiring him with power both to will and to do. Believing in Jesus, and heeding His call to repentance, men's feet are set upon the high-road of salvation; it is in the last analysis their faith in Him which saves them.

But we have already seen, and insisted all along, that the process of salvation, which begins in the renewal of a right spirit, requires for its completion a change of character, the conquest of self-centredness, and the substitution of the principle of self-giving for that of self-seeking. Now, if belief in Jesus, prompting repentance, enables men to take the first step—that *premier pas qui coûte*—towards salvation, it is the same belief

which helps them all the rest of the way. The pangs and sorrows of contrition are birth-pangs—not unto death, but unto life; they are, indeed, the guarantee of life still pulsing within, for dead things do not feel. As men see and confess by how far they have fallen short, measuring the full extent of their imperfection by Christ's perfection, a desire and power to strive anew is born in their souls. Indeed, this second step is already involved in the first one; the very consciousness and grief of failure is a promise and a guarantee of the possibility of attainment. If the comparison of our wilfulness, our disobedience and self-indulgence with the holiness of Christ accuses and condemns us, it is because of the invincible intuition that

> "As the veriest hind
> May yet be sprung of kings,"

so we, for all our frailty, are of the same nature as He, and where He led we can follow, though it be afar off. If we feel our unlikeness to the best as a reproach, we feel it also as a stimulus, because we are inwardly assured that the best is set before us to strive after, and because in Christ we have had a glimpse of a true humanity, not as marred by man, but as planned by God. In Him we become conscious, not only of our actual, but of our ideal self; He by whose side we shrink abashed within ourselves, in the awakened sense of guilt, is the same Christ who enables us to rive sin's fetters and tread them underfoot. He who casts us down is

also He who lifts us up; the Judge and the Saviour are one.

By faith in Jesus we are drawn to imitation of His life and loyalty to His teaching; and the intensity of the faith inspired by Him is attested by the unnumbered lives which have been moulded upon the example which He left us. No influence like His has ever made itself felt in the history of the world; no one personality has commanded such fervent devotion, none has so raised the moral level of the race. It is not by the elaborate things men have believed concerning Him, but by the singleness of conviction with which they have believed in Him, that this result has been achieved, and that still greater results will be achieved in the future. Living a full human life, bearing all that man could bear, having the same battle to wage as the humblest of His brethren, He has shown us the possibility of life with God and in God; if we have but faith in Him, we may have salvation through Him. Like every good gift and every perfect boon, this salvation is not—because it could not be—forced upon us, but offered for our acceptance: "He that is athirst, let him come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely."

## IV

It may, however, be urged that we are still left in some ambiguity. If we say, on the one hand, that belief in Jesus will save us, and on the other repudiate the idea that those who do not believe in Him are lost, are we not

involved in a hopeless self-contradiction? Not to be lost is to be saved—not to be saved is to be lost: do we, then, or do we not, regard Jesus as essential to salvation?

To this we have to answer, in the first place, that whatever else may be affirmed, doubted, or denied, there is no room in a civilised theology for a doctrine which would limit salvation to those professing any one form of religious belief. When we remember that the human race has been peopling the globe for, perhaps, a hundred thousand years—an era compared with which the rise of Christianity is but as yesterday; when we bear in mind that at the present moment the non-Christian population of the earth is computed at over a thousand million souls; such facts, and a modicum of imagination, should save us from thinking it even possible that the Creator should have intended all these for eternal loss, or have taken so late and so inadequate steps to secure a fraction of them against that awful fate. The desperate theory that "God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction" (Rom. ix. 22), can no longer satisfy those who see the central revelation of God not in a display of irresponsible "power" or "wrath," but in the love which was manifested in Jesus Christ. The world is at length leaving behind a conception of God which pictured Him as an absolute Eastern potentate or feudal duke, whose might was right, and who could dispose of His subjects' lives and liberty

without anyone daring to offer criticism; and Calvin's *decretum horribile*, according to which some were predestined to eternal life, others to eternal damnation, wa in the fulness of time abrogated by the "shattering ire and withering mirth" of a Scottish ploughman whose inspired gifts included that "indignation which makes verse."

But, secondly, the reasoning which says that "not to be lost is to be saved—not to be saved is to be lost," is, in spite of its apparent plausibility, very superficial. For in the great picture which makes up the world there are not only whites and blacks, but rather every variety of shade between these two; and when we survey the vast aggregation of mankind, we find that the simple dichotomy which would divide the race into saved and lost will not answer —indeed, the difficulty would be to point to any one individual who could be rightly described by either term. Among other things, we have still to rid ourselves of that crude theology which represents salvation as obtainable at a single bound: the momentous decision may be so taken, as a parliamentary vote may be recorded in favour of a course or an enterprise which it will take a generation to carry out. So the individual soul may decide for Christ, may cast its vote, in some one definite and memorable hour; but its vote is a *votum* in the real sense, *i.e.*, a vow, which may be kept or broken, but whose fulfilment must be co-extensive with life itself. Men are not saved once and for all, then; having turned in a certain direction, they are

*being* saved in so far as they continue to walk in it, but the goal, the completion of the process of salvation, lies necessarily out of sight for all.

Looking upon humanity, what we behold is neither saved nor lost; we see innumerable units struggling with more or less success to realise their dreams of the best and most desirable ends; many, alas, seeking satisfaction and joy where they never can be found—in the dust and slime, among the things of sense, among base pleasures and paltry vanities, in pursuit of things that injure the soul; and others we see following various leaders and witnesses to the light, none wholly unsuccessful, so long as they are honest in their search, yet nevertheless with most varying success, according to their discernment and perseverance. But of these guides of humanity there is One who stands in a place not of relative, but of absolute pre-eminence, because in Him all the broken and coloured gleams of truth are focussed into a radiance of purest white. Fully and finally He realises for us the best; once and for all He furnishes us with an immediate and soul-satisfying revelation of the truth about God and man—what is man's true relation to God, and how we may enter into that relation ourselves. Not only do we not look for a better or truer revelation than that which we have in Him, but we do not even regard a better or truer as conceivable. We cannot arrive at a more intimately true conception of God than that embodied in the name of Father; we cannot live our lives in

higher terms than in terms of love. As a vessel cannot be fuller than full, as gold cannot be purer than pure, so truth cannot be truer than it is in Christ Jesus.

Thus, while we may be bold enough in faith to feel convinced that the race as a whole is travelling towards God, by many routes, some more, some less circuitous, we see one straight, direct, inviting highway for the soul to God ; that way is Christ. We may believe that "there shall never be one lost good," and trust that all men shall ultimately attain to salvation ; but the process is a gradual one, and its speed in each case will naturally depend in large measure upon the individual's chosen guide and ideal. The highest results can only be reached by following the highest models, by cherishing the noblest aspirations, by obeying the finest stimuli ; and not in Socrates nor in Buddha, great as they were, has our race reached its summit, or God disclosed Himself to the fullest, but we have seen "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," "the very Image of His Substance." There are many teachers, but one Christ; many pathways to salvation, but one Saviour ; and this is God's commandment, His gracious decree and goodwill to us-ward, that we should believe in the name, and believing, live in the spirit, of His Son Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VI

### DID HE RISE FROM THE DEAD?

*"For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures; and that He appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then He appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, He appeared to me also."*—1 Cor. xv. 3—8.

The letter in which this very precise and detailed statement is made was written within less than thirty years from our Lord's death; the writer had been a convinced believer in the fact of the Resurrection for nearly twenty years previously, the staple of his preaching being "Jesus and the Resurrection" (Acts vii. 19); and in the passage before us he appeals, beside his own testimony, to that of numerous witnesses who were still alive. From Paul's manner of statement it appears obvious that these verses are no ordinary, casual remark made in passing, but, on the contrary, a very careful enumeration of the

known appearances of Jesus after His crucifixion and burial, an enumeration which the apostle makes with a full sense of its extreme importance. He is bringing forward in a very deliberate fashion all the evidence for these appearances of which he is possessed, and there can be no doubt that he is following a strict chronological order; we can hardly help feeling that, had he known more, he would have told us more.

But his statement is unique only as regards its fulness, and the deliberateness, amounting to solemnity, which characterises it; for Paul's belief in the Resurrection pervades his writings from end to end. It was this—his vision of the glorified Christ—which had marked the crisis in his life, and brought about his conversion; in the graphic phrase of Dr. Ballard, "to take out of these Pauline letters the actuality of Christ's resurrection would be equivalent to taking the spine out of the human body." Without any doubt whatsoever, this belief was held by the earliest Christian community with an intense and absolute conviction; nay, it is not too much to say that without such an unshakeable conviction these men and women could never have braved and endured the sufferings and persecutions—mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment, stonings and torturings, destitution and affliction—which are so pathetically referred to in the letter to the Hebrews: behind their superhuman fortitude there lay a superhuman certitude, which assured them that their Master's life had not ended with the tragedy of Calvary, but that He had been victoriously

manifested to His own again, and had entered into His glory.

Another circumstance should be stated at once, and in the most explicit terms : when these primitive believers said that God raised Him up, " having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it ; " when they applied to Him the words of the psalmist, " Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol ; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption " (Ps. xvi. 10), they meant that the soul of Jesus, after a brief sojourn in the subterranean place of departed spirits, where all such awaited the day of judgment, emerged from that underworld and re-entered His body, which thereupon left its sepulchre. Being Jews, and sharing the cosmology and eschatology of their age, they could not have figured the Resurrection to themselves in any other way ; that, and no other, was their idea of the final consummation in store for all the tribes of men, who should be raised in this manner on the last day.

And from their age to ours, the same belief has been that of countless multitudes of Christian people—that, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer, " Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven." The question for us to consider is whether this belief, so uncompromisingly stated, and so unflinchingly held for centuries, is true ; nor must we, in doing so, forget for a single moment the altogether exceptional place which

this doctrine holds in the affections of millions of humble souls, to whom the apostle's "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain," represents an argument outweighing all others in cogency. The right attitude of the critic towards this problem may be best indicated by two statements of Dr. Sanday's—"A fact so stupendous as the Resurrection needs to be supported by strong evidence," and "A belief that has had such incalculably momentous results must have had an adequate cause."[1] Of course, what evidence may be considered "strong," and what cause "adequate," are questions which will be differently answered by different minds.

## I

There are, in the first place, certain arguments of an *a priori* character, which we must briefly examine, because they are still among the most popular and widely used, and that by writers whose eminence entitles them to courteous consideration. It is not surprising to find that the "argument from congruity," which affirms the inherent probability of such a One as Jesus having entered the world in a supernatural manner, and performed miraculous deeds, makes its appearance in this connection also. The uniqueness of Jesus is urged as rendering a unique event like the physical resurrection one that should command our credence *per se*. Let us quote two quite recent utterances in which that view is put forward

[1] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, pp. 170 and 183.

"Christ being who and what He was," argues Dr. Ballard, "it was far more natural than otherwise that He should rise from the dead. . . . When that [*viz.* the uniqueness of Jesus,] is fully considered and accepted, the Resurrection becomes the only natural and consistent sequence to such a life, and character, and death."[1] "Let anyone quietly consider," says Dr. Horton, "what is implied by such a character as Jesus Christ. . . . The more the fact of Jesus is conceived as a concrete reality, entering into history and working through it, the more credible will it seem that He was not, and could not be, holden of death."[2] With every respect for these two scholars—who, of course, are voicing a very general view—we are bound to say that their premisses do not seem to us to establish their conclusion, not, *i.e.* the particular conclusion they mean to establish. We see no necessary connection, that is to say, between a unique soul and a resuscitated body, nor do we think that there is anything in our Lord's moral and spiritual supremacy which would lead anyone to infer *a priori* that shortly after His death His spirit must have miraculously re-entered His frame, and the latter disappeared from its place of burial. Nothing of the kind seems to follow with any logical or psychological necessity.

Another plea, which probably carries great weight with the rank and file of believers, and which it is common to find reiterated by sincere and devout thinkers, is that

[1] *Christian Essentials*, pp. 206, 207.

[2] *My Belief*, p. 144.

"upon the reality of Christ's resurrection depends the validity of our own hope of blessed immortality."[1] As a matter of fact, however, this argument runs directly counter to the one we have just glanced at—that, *i.e.*, which deduced the credibility of Christ's resurrection from His *uniqueness*. If so exceptional an event is to be believed because of the unique nature of our Lord—a nature supposed to be divided from ours by an "impassable gulf"—then His resurrection is no guarantee whatsoever of ours.

The fact is, that when the apostle spoke of the risen Saviour as "the first-fruits of them that are asleep," he used an argument of an extremely telling character with those to whom he was addressing himself, but no longer equally convincing to those who do not share the eschatological ideas to which we have already made reference above. How could anyone say, Paul reasons, that there is no resurrection of the dead—*i.e.*, no general resurrection of the bodies as well as the spirits of the departed? If such a consummation had ever been doubtful, Christ had removed the matter from the region of speculation to that of certainty: as He had been raised from Hades on the third day after death, so all the dead should be raised at the last trump. We say that to the Corinthian readers of the Epistle this course of reasoning must have appeared as convincing as it was intended to be; but we have to face the fact that our world-picture, and our outlook upon the future life, have

[1] Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

changed completely. We do not believe, as the first century did, that the soul, after death, descends into the hollow underworld, there to wait the signal of the last day, when it will rise, resume possession of its own body, and so present itself before the judgment-seat of God. The idea of such an intermediate state and a day of judgment has disappeared, together with the old cosmology and its threefold division of the universe into Heaven, Earth, and Hades. We look upon the future life as the continuation of this one, and well know that these mortal frames, once done with, will neither serve nor trouble us any longer. And for that very reason, because of this far-reaching change, the bodily resurrection of Christ, even if it is historical, cannot occupy quite the same place in our thinking which it did in that of Paul's contemporaries, since we do not anticipate sharing it as they did.

Again, it is frequently contended that the believer's spiritual experience adequately attests the fact that Christ is risen indeed. "Should it make no difference to the evidence for Christ's resurrection," it is asked, "that I have had personal dealings with the risen Christ as my Saviour, nearer and dearer than my own flesh and blood?"[1] To this it is sufficient to reply, with Professor Inge: "The inner light can only testify to spiritual truths. It always speaks in the present tense; it cannot guarantee any historical event, past or future. It cannot

[1] Dr. Forsyth on *Christian Experience*, Hibbert Journal, April, 1908.

guarantee either the gospel history or a future judgment. It can tell us that Christ is risen, and that He is alive for evermore, but not that He rose again the third day." It has to be admitted that this appeal to subjective and present experience in order to substantiate an objective and historic occurrence is wholly beside the mark; historical things are historically, not spiritually, discerned. The same kind of confusion is shown in such statements as that "belief in the resurrection of Christ from the dead has never been, and was never meant to be, established upon the historical evidence alone." We submit that whether a certain tomb, in which a certain body had been buried on a certain date, was found tenantless two days later, is to be established, if at all, upon historical evidence, and by no other means whatsoever. The problem is so complicated as it stands, that we must be severely on our guard against gratuitously introducing additional elements of confusion.

## II

Turning, now, from these preliminaries to the examination of the actual material before us, we naturally give first place to our earliest literary witness, Paul, who not only states that he saw the Lord, but gives us a careful list of His appearances to others. In that list the apostle, while quite definitely affirming certain events, does not go beyond the bare affirmation itself; the Lord "appeared"—literally, "was seen"—he tells us four times over, but whether any of these manifestations were

those of a body or of a spirit, and whether they were accompanied by spoken words, we should not be able to infer from this neutral statement, taken by itself. All we can be certain about is that he places the appearances to Cephas and the rest on precisely the same level as that to himself, since he uses the same term to describe them. Now, in Acts we have three accounts of that vision on the road to Damascus which changed Saul the persecutor into Paul the bondservant of Jesus Christ; these, it is fair to assume, represent Paul's own recollection of that momentous event, as remembered and set down by Luke, and from them it is possible, in spite of variations in detail, to gather an intelligible account of the apostle's own impressions. But the apparition described by him was unquestionably one of dazzling light, an altogether glorious phenomenon, without a suggestion of material body; indeed, anything physical seems excluded by the language used. If, therefore, Paul wished his readers to understand that the Lord was "seen" by Peter, James, the Twelve, and the Five Hundred, in the same sense in which He was seen by himself, the reference must be throughout to spiritual and not to material manifestations.

But on other grounds, too, it seems certain that the apostle's conception of the risen Christ was spiritual, and not physical. The whole argument of 1 Cor. xv. 35—56 shows that he shared the prevalent Jewish idea of his day, according to which at the resurrection—*i.e.*, when the soul resumed possession of its body—the latter

underwent a change of substance, the corruptible putting on incorruption. If, then, the risen Christ was regarded by him as in any true sense the first-fruits of them that are asleep, His body, too, must have been "raised in glory," and become "a spiritual body." Paul, therefore, cannot have held the ultra-material views of the resurrection of Christ which we find set forth in detail in the Third and Fourth Gospel.

Nevertheless, this conception of Paul's not only does not militate against his belief in the tenantless sepulchre, but rather necessitates it. The thought of a *merely* spiritual survival and manifestation did not so much as present itself to his mind; if Christ had been "raised," then, according to the thought of the time, the tomb must have been empty, the one fact directly implying the other. Until this fact is realised, it seems incomprehensible that the apostle should have made no reference to the empty tomb, assuming that he was cognisant of it; it is only when we understand that he did not believe in the resurrection *because* of the empty tomb, but that the latter followed as a necessary corollary from those appearances of Christ which he records, that his complete silence about the events of the first Easter morning ceases to puzzle us, or to suggest, as the only possible conclusion, that he did not know concerning them—with the further inference that he did not know, because no such events had taken place. This as Professor Kirsopp Lake has convincingly shown in his admirable survey of *The Historical Evidence for th*

*Resurrection*, does not by any means follow; and the present writer is happy to acknowledge his indebtedness to Professor Lake for welcome corrections on this and other important details.

Paul, then, may have been fully acquainted with the finding of the empty tomb, and not have considered it worth mention, the appearances themselves being, to him and to his readers, the really important proofs; but there may have been yet another reason for his passing this matter over, and not mentioning the women's share. He was only concerned to name those by whom the Lord had been actually *seen* after the resurrection; and in the oldest tradition, *viz.*, Mark's, whom Luke here follows, the women merely found the grave unoccupied, but saw no appearance of the risen One. The empty grave by itself, and apart from after-appearances, proved nothing at all, as the body of the Lord might have been simply "taken away"; the appearances, on the other hand, from the contemporary point of view, in and by themselves pre-supposed that the Saviour's body had quitted its resting place. At the same time it is fair to argue that had Paul known such highly impressive details as those which we read in Matthew's Gospel—how the tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers in order to prevent any fraud; how, just as the women came to visit the sepulchre, an angel whose appearance was as lightning descended amid the shock of an earthquake, and rolled away the stone from the entrance, while the Roman

guard became as dead men with fright, and so forth: if, we say, the apostle had been familiar with these features, he would very likely have referred to them, and his total silence furnishes some presumptive evidence in favour of the view that these details, at any rate, which are peculiar to Matthew's Gospel, represent later embellishments.

## III

The last paragraph, however, has already carried us from Paul's testimony to that of the Evangelists; and this, we may frankly confess, presents a maze one has some hesitation in entering. Professor Sanday guardedly calls the resurrection narratives which close our Gospels "unassimilated and unharmonised;" Dr. Horton, with less reserve, refers to them as "disjointed stories." As a matter of fact, so great is the amount of irreconcilable disagreement between these four accounts that, after setting them out in tabular form, one's first feeling is one of hopelessness. Where we meet with direct contradictions in regard to almost every conceivable detail, how are we to decide which version approximates more closely to history? Did the women go to the grave to see the sepulchre (*Matthew*) or to anoint the Lord's body (*Mark*)? Did they enter the sepulchre (*Mark* and *Luke*) or remain outside (*Matthew* and *John*)? Did they find the grave closed (*Matthew*) or open (*Mark*)? Did they see a young man, two men, an angel, or two angels? Our four witnesses give four versions of that one detail! Did Jesus appear to the women as they were departing

from the tomb (*Matthew*) or to Mary Magdalene as she was standing without the tomb (*John*), or was there no such appearance to the women (*Mark*[1] and *Luke*)? Was the message given to the women for transmission to the disciples to the effect that they should go to Galilee as the place where they were to see their Master (*Matthew* and *Mark*), or did Jesus appear to the disciples at once in Jerusalem (*Luke* and *John*), with the instruction that the capital should be the starting-point of their activity (*Luke*), a command emphasised by the later injunction that they were not to depart from Jerusalem (*Acts*)? Did the women deliver the message to the disciples (*Matthew* and *Luke ;* cp. *John*), or did they say nothing to anyone (*Mark*)? This is not anything like a complete catalogue of the discrepancies with which we are confronted ; yet even these are numerous and grave enough to make one at first sight despair of disentangling such a coil. To be told that these disagreements show an absence of collusion brings scant comfort; surely, we retort, even without collusion or conspiracy, four people relating the same events might have been found in more tolerable accord!

After a time, however, certain clues and criteria begin to suggest themselves, and with their help it becomes possible to educe a certain amount of order out of this bewildering chaos of testimony. We feel, for instance, justified in laying it down as a general principle that of two or more versions of an event preference should be

[1] Mark xvi. 9—20 is by another hand; see p. 251.

given to the simpler as against the more elaborate, the former being likely to represent the more primitive form of a tradition which was certain to grow ever more detailed and definite. Thus—to apply this principle to some particular point—it is more inherently probable that it was a young man in a white robe whom the women met at the open tomb than an angel whose appearance was as lightning, and whose descent from heaven in order to roll away the stone was accompanied by an earthquake. We can understand the second account developing from the first, but not *vice versâ*; probability therefore favours Mark's version as against Matthew's as well as John's, and in a lesser degree Luke's, who substitutes "two men in dazzling apparel" for Mark's one white-robed youth.

Indeed, the more we study the various narratives, the more we discover that there are certain laws of historical and psychological probability which enable us to pick our way and discriminate, with a fair amount of reasonable confidence in the soundness of our decisions. Let us illustrate this process in reference to three or four details, whose importance will emerge as we go along.

(1) Take first of all the part played by Joseph of Arimathæa in the disposal of the Lord's body. Mark refers to him as a councillor of honourable estate—*i.e.*, a respected member of the Sanhedrin—who was "looking for the kingdom of God," a description applying to the Pharisees generally, and carrying in itself no hint of sympathy with Jesus; Luke follows this description,

adding that Joseph had been no party to the sentence passed on the Lord; Matthew does not call him a member of the Sanhedrin, but a rich disciple of Jesus; while John in turn appropriates Matthew's version, adding that Joseph's discipleship, like that of Nicodemus, was secret. According to the Synoptists, Joseph obtained the body, wrapped it in a clean cloth, and laid it in a tomb without anointing it; according to the Fourth Evangelist, on the other hand, there was a full and costly funeral, the "spices" and their use being specially mentioned. Now if Joseph was a disciple of the Master's, it is not likely that he would have omitted the common rite of anointing His body; if, on the other hand, the Fourth Evangelist is correct, there was no occasion for the women to visit the tomb for the purpose of doing what had already been done. We conclude that the Synoptic account of the burial—*i.e.*, without the customary anointment—is the accurate one; but in doing so we also practically conclude that Joseph was not a disciple or friend of the Lord's, but simply a member of the Sanhedrin.

But what motive, other than discipleship and sympathy, could Joseph of Arimathæa have had for charging himself with the burial of Jesus? That was precisely how the later Evangelists reasoned, and hence their attempts to explain his course of action. But the fact is that he, or at any rate the administrative body of which he was a member, had a very real and cogent motive for taking that course. The death of Jesus had taken place (Mark

xv. 44) unexpectedly early, it being customary for the victims of crucifixion to survive for days in lingering agony; when, therefore, death occurred during the afternoon, it became incumbent upon the Sanhedrin to carry out the injunction of Deut. xxi. 22, 23, to bury the body the same day. In asking Pilate's permission to do so, Joseph may have acted as the Sanhedrin's representative, and in an official capacity; this would explain the bare funeral the Synoptists relate, with the rite of anointing omitted — just such burial as decency would accord even to a malefactor who had paid the extreme penalty of the law. And this omission, in turn, would have furnished the women's motive for visiting the grave, as recorded in Mark and Luke.

(2) We turn next to the nature of the grave which received the body, and are struck with the divergent accounts given by the Evangelists. Mark, followed by Matthew, speaks of it as a tomb hewn out of a rock, an exceedingly common and therefore probable mode of sepulture, as we are told that the environs of Jerusalem were "honeycombed" with such *kokim*, or rock-tombs, which were found close to each other. Luke, on the other hand, speaks of a tomb of hewn stone, which experts pronounce a far rarer and hence less probable type of grave in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; while John refers to a tomb in a garden, an excavation made in the soil, into which it was possible to look only by stooping—a sepulchre closed at the top by means of a stone lid or slab which had not to be rolled away, but

lifted up.[1] Among these mutually contradictory descriptions we again decide in favour of Mark's, as the most likely under the circumstances.

(3) What of the guard of Roman soldiers who, according to Matthew, watched the sepulchre, and the seal which was to prevent any tampering? Here the argument from the silence of the other Evangelists is reinforced by quite a number of considerations. Matthew's story is obviously a later accretion, and untrustworthy in every particular. The interview of the Pharisees with Pilate would probably, and the affixing of a seal would certainly, have been a violation of the Sabbath; the predictions of the resurrection to which the Pharisees refer were not likely to be better known among the enemies of the Lord than among His friends, who evidently were quite unprepared for such an event; Pilate was not sufficiently interested in what, to him, was a feud between Jewish religious factions to grant such a request, if it had been made to him; and the soldiers could not have informed Pilate *who* had stolen the body (Matt. xxviii. 13) while they slept, nor would they, for any bribe, have confessed to having fallen asleep while on guard—a military offence punishable by death.[2] The

[1] *Cp.* Mark xvi. 3, Matt. xxviii. 2, Luke xxiv. 2, John xx. 1. The Authorised and Revised Versions' rendering in the latter place —"taken away" instead of "lifted up"—hides the meaning of the original, and thus obscures the difference between the Synoptic and the Johannine accounts.

[2] It is an interesting circumstance that the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, which gives the story of the Roman guard, supplies a

story, moreover, is discredited by the circumstance that the women showed no fear at all of the soldiers in approaching the tomb, being solely concerned about the heavy stone which guarded the entrance.

(4) Lastly—for this hurried survey does not pretend to exhaustiveness—we must decide as to the antecedent likelihood of the first appearances of the risen One to the disciples having taken place in Galilee, as stated by Matthew and hinted by Mark (xvi. 7), or in Jerusalem, as declared by Luke and John. It is plain that we have here two rival theories, only one of which can be historically accurate; the problem, however, is complicated for us by the defective state of Mark's closing chapter, which breaks off abruptly at verse 8, the remaining verses being a compilation founded upon the other Gospels. Why and how Mark's original ending came to be missing early in the Church's history—whether it was accidentally lost or designedly suppressed—is matter for speculation; we can only surmise from the tenor of the first eight verses, and the special reference to Peter in verse 7, that the original Gospel closed with a manifestation of the risen Lord in Galilee

much more plausible explanation of the sequel: "They of the centurion's company hastened by night to Pilate, leaving the tomb which they were guarding, and told all they had seen. . . . Then they all (*i.e.*, the scribes and Pharisees and elders) came near and besought him, and entreated him to command the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing as to the things which they had seen. . . . Pilate therefore commanded the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing."

and a restitution of Peter, such as may have furnished the foundation of the episode related in John xxi., though transposed into the unmistakable Johannine key.

But in any case it is probable that our first two Evangelists adhere to the earliest and genuine tradition when they tell us that the Master's arrest was followed by the immediate and precipitate flight of the disciples. Peter alone, bolder than the rest, followed Him at an unsuspicious distance (Matt. xxvi. 58; Mark xiv. 54; Luke xxii. 54); but the mere hint of his being connected with the Accused was so fraught with danger as to provoke him to a very orgy of vociferous denial. The panic-stricken disciples may have lingered that night of terror in hiding-places near the capital; but it is safe to suppose that they hurriedly retraced their steps into their native province, deeming the cause irretrievably lost, and feeling, not unnaturally, that Jerusalem just then was not a secure place for those who had attained to some public notoriety as intimate associates of One who was now a fallen idol. It was the women, not the disciples, whom Matthew and Mark speak of as present at the final scene in the great tragedy; Luke's mention of "all His acquaintance" witnessing the Lord's crucifixion is an attempt at a compromise; the Fourth Evangelist's account of the three Marys and the beloved disciple standing by the Cross, within speaking distance of the Divine Sufferer, cannot be defended historically. Our finding, therefore, since everything points to the

disciples having left the capital at once, is in favour of the Galilean as against the Jerusalem tradition of the first appearances.

It has to be added that Matthew and Mark differ from Luke and John not only as regards the *locality* of the manifestations, but also as regards their *character*; as we had already occasion to point out, those recorded in our Third and Fourth Gospel lay the most marked stress upon the physical, material substance of the body of the risen Christ. "Handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold Me having. . . . Have ye here anything to eat? And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish. And He took it, and did eat before them" (Luke xxiv. 39—43). "Reach hither thy finger, and see My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into My side" (John xx. 27). In Matthew there are no corresponding materialistic features, neither have we any reason to affirm that such features were to be found in the missing ending of Mark, though, on the other hand, we cannot make an assertion to the contrary. What, however, seems most likely, in the light of Paul's theory of a transubstantiated, spiritualised resurrection body—a view which cannot possibly be harmonised with the Lucan and Johannine presentations just quoted—is that these latter represent a later development, having for their object to counteract the tendency to the early heresy known as Docetism, whose adherents denied that the Son of God had come in the flesh, and held that He had suffered in semblance only. This

heresy made its appearance very early in the Church's history; we have allusions to it in 1 John iv. 2 and 2 John 7, while the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, to which we have had occasion to refer, was written in the Docetic interest. Thus Luke's and John's excessive insistence upon the *corporeality* of the risen Christ finds its explanation in a protest against the *false spirituality* of the Docetists, which was doing its best to substitute a phantasmal for a real Christ, to the infinite danger of the faith; on the other hand, when we understand the polemical purpose of these episodes in the Third and Fourth Gospel, we shall feel all the less under any necessity of regarding them as historical events.[1]

## IV

The conclusions, then, at which we have provisionally arrived, may be briefly summarised by saying that in every particular we have so far found Mark's account the most deserving of credence, both in what it states and in what it leaves unsaid. Alike as regards the place and the manner of the Lord's burial, his account of what

[1] "But is it to be imagined," will be the question of those who are not acquainted with the literary methods of antiquity, "that tradition would invent words which the Lord never spoke, and represent them as His own utterances?" The answer is that this was one of the recognised methods of ancient writers, *viz.*, to make historical personages express those views which it was honestly felt that they must have held themselves, or wished to be held by others. A most interesting illustration of this custom is offered in the lately discovered Akhmim manuscript of the

took place on the Easter morning, and his hint as to where the first manifestations of the risen Christ to the disciples took place, his narrative is distinguished by its simplicity and its agreement with antecedent probability. Mark represents the earliest, most trustworthy tradition; can we arrive at the facts which, in turn, may account for that tradition? Such an attempt at the reconstruction of the facts has recently been made by Professor Kirsopp Lake, to whose minute and fascinating volume on the historical evidence for the resurrection we have already referred above; his hypothesis appears to us so remarkably illuminating and valuable, that we shall in what follows simply endeavour to lay it in outline before the reader.

When the Lord was arrested on the eve of the Passover, "all the disciples left Him, and fled"; they

Gospels, a document which is assigned to the fifth, possibly even to the fourth, century. In this writing Mark xvi. 14 is followed by the following remarkable interpolation, the Lord having upbraided the disciples for their disbelief of His resurrection: "And they excused themselves, saying, 'This world of iniquity and of unbelief is under Satan, who by reason of unclean spirits suffereth not men to comprehend the true power of God.' And Christ answered them, 'The term of years of the power of Satan is fulfilled, but other dangers are nigh at hand. And for them that sinned I was delivered unto death, that they might return to the truth, and sin no more, that they might inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.'" Nobody imagines that this episode is historical; but as proof of the ease with which such utterances were framed and placed upon the Master's lips, this latest discovery is peculiarly instructive.

were marked men, for whom to remain in Jerusalem meant dire peril, and, as we already saw, it appears most probable that they set out for the North at once, despair and fear in their hearts, without waiting for the inevitable end. Early in the following afternoon bigotry and fanaticism had triumphed, and the Son of man had breathed His last. The law required that the body should not lie unburied all night, and arrangements had consequently to be made for the immediate disposal of the remains. That Joseph of Arimathæa acted on behalf of the Sanhedrin, and not as a friend or disciple of the Lord's, is rendered still more likely by the fact that the women are not mentioned as performing any of those last offices of piety in which they must have longed to take part—a sorrowful satisfaction which no fellow-disciple would have denied them. So we may imagine a hurried funeral in the fast-gathering dusk attended by the barest ceremony, while the women—fearful, tear-blinded, overwrought by the day's catastrophe—followed afar off. The body was deposited in one of the rock-tombs which abounded in the neighbourhood, and one of which looked much like another. From where they stood, the women beheld where He was laid; but, in order to remember exactly to which one among these fissures in the rock the body was committed, they would have needed daylight, closer proximity to the scene than their fear permitted, and above all a collected frame of mind and steady nerves. Let those who have followed the remains of some loved one to the last resting place,

in desolation of spirit, testify whether they could find their way again, unaided, to the precise spot which has received the body! Heart-broken, the women return to their lodgings—their Master has not even received the usual token of respect, the last chrism with fragrant ointment. This omission, at least, they are resolved to remedy out of their poor means, as soon and as secretly as they can. On the Sabbath the law forbade such a work; but as early as possible on the following morning, before day-break, they set out very quietly on their sad errand, hoping that they would meet no one, and that their combined strength would suffice to move the stone with which the entrance had been guarded. In the uncertain dawn they proceed to what they think is the exact spot; but to their utter bewilderment, and yet very naturally, they make a mistake, and find themselves facing an open sepulchre instead of the closed one they are in search of—and in the entrance, or close beside it, stands a young man. Possibly he has seen these women before; anyhow, he guesses their object, especially when he notices their obvious distress and helplessness—perhaps one of them has involuntarily exclaimed, "They have taken the Lord away!" "You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified," says the young man, desiring to help them; "you have come to the wrong place; He is not here—behold" (with a gesture in the direction of the real tomb), "there is the place where they laid Him!" What more natural than this? But what more natural also than that the

women fled headlong, startled, feeling they had been detected after all, not knowing whether by a friend or an enemy, and with a very confused impression of what the young man did say? What wonder that afterwards the idea presented itself to their minds that they had seen an angelic apparition, and that for the time being they "said nothing to anyone," being afraid to confide in any stranger, and the disciples having gone?

No one would pretend, and Professor Lake would be the last man to pretend, that this is more than a mere theory; but it offers the obvious advantage of great simplicity, and of assuming nothing that is inherently improbable, while it sufficiently explains the earliest tradition, supplying in unforced fashion just that nucleus of fact of which we were in search. As a working hypothesis, we consider that this explanation cannot be disregarded; and without presuming to speak with assurance where Professor Lake himself speaks with modesty and caution, we submit that this is really how things might have happened. So much appears certain, that the story of the tomb being found empty by the women, however much elaborated by later tradition, is not a mere invention, but rests on a foundation of fact; and in the long run it seems that we are shut up to the choice between the real resurrection of the very body of Jesus and some such explanation as this. In opposition to the view which urges upon the theologian to adopt as his rule, "of two mysteries to choose the greater," we hold that where a natural explanation is available, no super-

natural one need be sought or appealed to. Miracles, to use the language of the schoolmen, *non sunt multiplicanda præter necessitatem.*

From the experience of the women, and the events of the first Easter morning, we must now turn to the disciples, who on reaching their homes probably tried to take up the broken threads of their lives as fishermen and the like.[1] We know from the statement in Matthew, and infer from the hint in Mark, that it was there, in their own Galilee, that they first saw the risen Lord, and this version, as we have seen, is to be preferred to the statement that they remained in Jerusalem. The one fact of which there can be no doubt at all, is that these men in some manner became convinced, while they were in Galilee, that their Lord had triumphed over death, and had manifested Himself to them; it is far more difficult to say in what manner this assurance was conveyed to them, and whether the visions which the disciples had—if they were visions—were of an objective or of a subjective character. How we shall think on this matter, will probably depend in a large measure on our general attitude towards the phenomena investigated by psychical research. The question is one on which none will dogmatise, save dogmatists—and such are not confined to one camp; those of us who do not fall under that category will make up their minds that this is probably one of the

[1] Compare John xxi., which many critics regard as based on the same tradition which we might have read in a simpler form in the missing conclusion of Mark xvi.

riddles we shall not solve. *Ignoramus, ignorabimus.* The present writer inclines to the view that the appearances were objective; but even if they were not, we can imagine the spirit of the Master communicating to the spirits of His friends so intensely effective an assurance of His survival and presence that they could not but externally project and visualise their experience, conconinced henceforth that they had seen the Lord. The inevitable uncertainty surrounding this subject will least disturb those Christians who understand that the most real of realities are ever those which eye hath not seen, but which the soul has felt. "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

This we know—that the same men who had fled from Jerusalem, shipwrecked in hope, broken and dispirited, returned to the capital shortly after, full of consecrated courage, ready to face the worst their enemies could inflict upon them, transformed from their former, timid and often unworthy selves. To say that such a momentous change came to pass without an adequate cause to account for it, is to postulate a greater miracle than any we may deny. We may lack the data on which we could base a more definite statement of what had happened to them; but something did happen, and that something was sufficient to render the disciples absolutely sure that they had been in personal, living contact with Jesus, a certainty which alone enabled them to continue the work which had been so tragically interrupted.

Needless to say, in speaking of these experiences which made new men of the disciples, we are not suggesting that they—the eleven—were the only ones to receive a like joyous assurance; that some among the faithful women who had remained in Jerusalem, and especially Mary Magdalene, were blessed with a similar certainty, similarly conveyed, can hardly be doubted, notwithstanding the absence of their names from Paul's list. Did the women go back to Galilee, or did they continue in Jerusalem until the disciples returned thither? This, too, we have no means of knowing; but wherever the disciples and the women met again, we are well able to surmise the joyous nature of that reunion. The disciples, having seen the Master, could not do other than assume that His body had left the grave; the women's account of their adventure on the Easter morning would fit in exactly with that assumption, and confirm the disciples' vision. If Christ had been raised from the dead, and manifested Himself to His followers, His tomb must be tenantless: and here were the women, who had found it even so! Nevertheless, it cannot be too strongly realised that the episode of the empty grave was of secondary importance in the early Church's belief, as is, indeed, evident from Paul's complete silence concerning it. Nothing could come nearer a complete inversion of the truth than Pressensé's description of the empty tomb of Jesus as the cradle of the Church; had it been that, he who went about from land to land preaching the risen Christ would not have so entirely passed it over. The

faith of the early Church was kindled by the disciples' living experience of that Living One who was dead, and is alive for evermore; the empty tomb was "not the ground of belief in the Resurrection; it was a deduction from it."

## V

Before closing this inquiry, we must briefly deal with one or two arguments that are frequently put forward in defence of the older view. One of these may be summarised in the question, "What about Christ's own predictions of His resurrection?" Now, it is quite true that our Lord is reported to have repeatedly referred to that event in the plainest possible terms; but the very plainness of these alleged references makes it all the more incomprehensible that the disciples should not have understood them, as we find stated again and again.[1] How could they have failed to understand words of such unmistakable import? As a matter of fact, the reiterated allegations of inability on the disciples' part to grasp the obvious sense of these predictions point in quite another direction; it would seem that, while these prophecies were current when the Gospels were written, the Evangelists themselves felt that they did not harmonise very well with certain other features in their narratives. It is impossible to read the story of the days preceding and

[1] See, *e.g.*, Mark ix. 10 and 32; Luke xviii. 34. The request of the sons of Zebedee in Mark x. 35 ff. shows an equal failure to understand the prediction reported *ibid.*, 33, 34.

following the crucifixion without becoming aware that the disciples were utterly unprepared for any such event as the resurrection; their evident panic and despair at the turn events were taking, their flight immediately after their Master's arrest, the women's very errand to anoint the body, all tell the same tale; who, *e.g.*, would propose to anoint a body whose resurrection was being expected almost immediately? The rite was a burial rite, a farewell to hope. Moreover, we have indication upon indication that in the circle of the disciples themselves belief in the Lord's risen life did not spread without encountering difficulties: "some doubted;" "neither believed they them;" "they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen"—such details would certainly not have been inserted in the Gospels but that there remained a lively tradition of the disbelief with which the resurrection met at first even among some of the Lord's own associates. "If that was indeed the case," the Evangelists argued, "then the disciples could not have understood Christ's predictions." If that was indeed the case, we argue, then no such predictions could have been made.

Again, it is still customary among defenders of the physical resurrection to ask what, unless the events took place as related in the Gospels, became of the body of the Saviour. We may be pardoned for saying that, regarded as an argument, such a query is rather distressing; it is sufficiently answered in the words, "The dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto

God who gave it." The real Jesus was not the frail mortal form which was taken down from the Cross, and laid to rest, but that sublime and deathless Spirit —"God of God, Light of Light"—which for a brief space inhabited and shone through that form. Though we had known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer.

Lastly, we are told that "the transformation of the physical body of Christ into the spiritual body certainly requires no more blind trust than the suggested continuation of the personality of Jesus without a body at all."[1] This, we must confess, does not strike us as a very well-considered statement on the part of the eminent theologian who puts it forth. For the belief in personal immortality, in the survival of the soul, does not appear to us as resting on "blind trust" at all, but to be capable of a reasoned defence[2]; whereas the idea of

[1] Ballard, *Christian Essentials*, p. 212.

[2] Thus, *e.g.*, Dr. Ballard himself writes: "We believe in immortality because we believe in God. Assuming that the term God signifies not merely a 'Higher Power' or a 'Supreme Force immanent in nature,' but the infinite moral Personality whom Jesus teaches us to call our Heavenly Father, it is impossible that He should be such and yet be either content Himself, or have us content, with such a conflict of moral contradictions as this present world exhibits. All that is best and all that is worst in humanity alike point to some further sphere of action, in which the good may be developed, and the bad permanently distinguished from it." (*Christian Essentials*, pp. 316, 317.) Compare also the statement of an eminent evolutionist like Mr. John Fiske, quoted *ibid.*, p. 318: "In the course of evolution there is no more philo-

the transubstantiation of the natural into a spiritual body represents a particular phase of the general belief in the resuscitation of our bodies after death—a belief which has been very generally abandoned among thoughtful people. And moreover, as we have already pointed out at length, the narratives in Luke and John do not represent the body of the risen Christ as transubstantiated or spiritual at all, but seek to produce the very contrary impression, emphasising the flesh and bones, the print of the nails, and the wound in the side. It was for that very reason that we set those narratives aside as palpably unhistorical, though explained by the Evangelists' anti-Docetic purpose; of all the incidents related, those which lay the greatest stress upon the material aspect of the Resurrection are the least credible.

Where, then, do we stand at the conclusion of this investigation, and what is the answer we return to our question, "Did He rise from the dead?" The answer is, "Surely." After the frankest examination of the evidence, and making all allowance for the growth of legend, as well as admitting the confusion and variation which mark the testimony at our disposal, the central certainty emerges unscathed, that it was impossible for Him whose life was Life indeed to be holden of death.

For what, let us ask ourselves, is the kernel of the

sophical difficulty in man's acquiring immortal life, than in his acquiring the erect posture and articulate speech." This seems hardly the language of "blind trust."

resurrection faith, the inner and inmost significance of the resurrection stories? Is it only that a human frame which had been done to death, marred and disfigured, was miraculously reanimated, and miraculously disappeared into the clouds? We reply that assuredly these narratives have a deeper and truer meaning. In reading them, we are dealing only with the temporary form in which an enduring truth clothed itself, even as the immortal soul is clothed upon with a mortal body: and as we cherish the bodies of our dear ones for the souls which they enshrine, so these olden stories can never fail to move, never be other than of supreme value to us, because of Him concerning whom they tell in child-like fashion what is yet the essential truth. That no rocky tomb could hold Him; that He manifested His triumph over death in unmistakable fashion to His followers; that that Life was mightier after it escaped from the trammels of this vesture of decay than it had ever been "in the days of His flesh;" that it inspired and transfigured the lives of commonplace men and women, lifting them to heights of courage and self-surrender they had never dreamed of scaling—these statements partially express that truth. For a time the Word had become flesh, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth; His earthly mission fulfilled, it needed only for the immortal Spirit to be set free from the tabernacle which for a few years confined Him, in order to prove Himself the mightiest power of God unto salvation—that Living Christ who holds sway over the souls of

individuals and has changed the current of the world's history. Death hath no more dominion over Him, but rather has He dominion to give us victory over sin and death.

Do we wish there had been a physical miracle, indubitably attested by those who had beheld the Lord issuing from the sepulchre in the very body that had been crucified? Do we wish that we could have so seen and touched and handled Him? Are we, then, of that disposition which will not believe in spiritual things apart from material proofs? We repeat yet again that it is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing. Truly we may say that by appearing to His own He gloriously demonstrated the impotence of the grave and the quenchlessness of the spirit—that He abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light; but the resurrection faith is more than belief in a past event, or hope in a future consummation. It concerns the present most of all, and is most seen in those who acknowledge His nearness, answer to His call, yield to Him their loyalty, and serve Him as the Lord and Inspirer of their lives. Those who have been quickened together with Christ and raised up with Him, know the power of His resurrection beyond gainsaying: they need no proof of mortal sense that the Lord is risen indeed who can say—though but in rarest moments of purest peace and joy—"*I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me.*"

## CHAPTER VII

### DID HE DIE FOR US?

In previous chapters of this book we have repeatedly had occasion to glance at the question of human sin in relation to our Lord's personality. In discussing His own sinlessness; in asking whether He had the power to grant forgiveness; in attempting to determine whether, and in what sense, belief in Him was necessary to salvation, we were inevitably brought face to face with the problem presented by the phenomenon of sin. Inevitably, too, we encountered on each of those occasions the theory of the Fall as the origin of man's sinfulness; indeed, in the long run we always come back to this particular belief as furnishing the basis of the whole traditional doctrinal edifice. If we once believe in "the universal ruin of the whole human race" as the consequence of the supposed transgression of our first parents, then we may possibly go a step further, and agree that "there was but one remedy which, under the mysterious law of the Divine procedure, could come to the aid of the prostrate; and that was, if some son of Adam could be born, unconnected with original transgression, and innocent, who could benefit the rest, both by his example

and by his merit."[1] If it is true, not only that "In Adam's fall, we sinnèd all," but that "the river of human life is poisoned at its very source," so that men are by nature the children of wrath, and unable to emerge from that condition by their own efforts, then such a desperate condition might well seem to call for desperate remedies. If man was lost through another's guilt, then he might, with the same moral cogency, be saved by another's merit; if he could not, and that without any fault of his own, achieve such righteousness as might dispose God to look favourably upon him, and if God nevertheless desired his restoration, then that righteousness must be "imputed" to him; if the race had incurred an infinite debt of suffering, which demanded payment, then only the suffering of an infinitely Righteous Person could be accepted as the equivalent, and He Himself as the sufficient substitutionary Victim. Thus we arrive by a natural progression at the question, Did Christ die for us? and are we forgiven ultimately solely in virtue of that death, and because of the sufficiency of the ransom paid for us by Christ on the Cross?

I

In the attitude of the very earliest believers towards the Lord's death we may note three distinct, and in their distinction most instructive, stages. To the disciples themselves, as we have seen already, the Cross meant first of all the end of everything; when they

[1] Leo the Great, Serm. iv.; quoted by Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 219, note.

came within sight of it they fled in absolute despair, feeling that all was lost. All their expectations had suffered an utter eclipse; the shameful death of the Master, whom they had hoped to see anointed King of Israel, could only be interpreted as the most unrelieved and overwhelming failure. And the Cross would have remained a fatal stumbling-block but for the conviction which presently took hold of the disciples, that their Lord had gained a wondrous conquest over death, so that the seeming humiliation of His fate had been swallowed up in victory. To Jew and Gentile alike, a crucified Saviour was a contradiction in terms; it was only the triumph of the Easter morn that could offset the defeat and tragedy of Calvary. The Cross by itself would have continued incomprehensible: only the Resurrection reconciled men to that dark memory. During this second stage the crucifixion was still regarded as a blot, which was fortunately more than wiped out by the Lord's subsequent exaltation from the dead to the right hand of God. But presently yet another, deeper and truer interpretation began to gain ground. Was that death of the Cross really an episode to be apologised for as though it needed a certain amount of explaining in the light of other events? Was it an untoward and humiliating close of Christ's earthly ministry, and not rather its crown? Was not that death itself the glorious and predestined culmination of His life, and the supreme agency of redemption? So, step by step, men rose to the daring paradox that "the

Christ must suffer;" the Gospel itself could be described as the Word of the Cross, and the Christ who was preached as Saviour was Christ crucified. The completeness and rapidity with which this revulsion of feeling accomplished itself, constitute a most arresting phenomenon, into whose meaning we shall have to inquire.

As a matter of historic fact, nothing is more certain than that the pathos of our Lord's unmerited death was from the first largely instrumental in helping to make His memory immortal, and to endear His name to all generations. The Cross has focussed men's universal regard upon the Figure of Him who died on it; it has made an irresistible appeal to our most human emotions. Jesus might have been successful, as the world counts success; He might have escaped the machinations of His enemies, made His way back to Galilee, and become the Head of a flourishing religious community; but in that case He could never have exercised upon the world at large one thousandth part of the influence which His death has gained Him. That unjust condemnation, that utter loyalty to truth, that unmerited agony—these have furnished an undying theme, exhaling an imperishable fragrance; it is Christ "lifted up" who has drawn men after Him.

But is that death a martyrdom like many another, about which we ought to feel as we do, *e.g.*, about that of Socrates? Or what is it that gives to Calvary its unique character and significance? Is it true, as Christendom affirms with one voice, that that death has a

wider and deeper meaning than any other, a meaning which comes home to us individually? What is the authentic experience which expresses itself in the statement, "We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son," or the assurance that "He died for us"? Only the shallowest conceit would say that the immense volume of testimony which supports these statements is of no worth, or bears witness only to a prolonged delusion; an experience so wide-spread and so uniform presents *primâ facie* evidence of resting on a basis, not of delusion, but of reality.

But while we shall listen with due respect to the cloud of witnesses who tell us that the death of Jesus has an enormous bearing on that vital concern which we call our salvation, we shall also remember that it is possible to feel aright and to reason amiss concerning the same matter—possible to perceive a fact most keenly, and yet to go astray in explaining it. There is scarcely a natural phenomenon which did not receive some fanciful explanation in the ages before science: a comet meant the wrath of God or a prophecy of war; an epidemic might be interpreted as the punishment sent because a sufficient number of masses had not been said at the shrine of some patron-saint. We suggest that something similar will be found true in connection with the great subject which we are discussing. Men have felt, instinctively and intimately, that the death of Christ made some profound difference to them, and in so far we shall see that they have been right; but in diagnosing the fact

itself, they have frequently advanced explanations which to-day obscure rather than explain it.

## II

In the Pauline system everything may be said to turn upon the historical character of the transgression and expulsion of our first parents from paradise; this was the origin of that grievous burden of sin under which humanity groaned so hopelessly—this also was that which explained, as it necessitated, the drama of redemption. It is no exaggeration to say that the apostle's chief interest in our Lord was practically confined to His death and resurrection. In Paul's view, the death which Jesus suffered was an expiatory death, the paying of a price; and since the resurrection clearly attested that He could not have suffered that death on His own behalf, or in order to expiate any sins of His own, it demonstrated that He had suffered it vicariously, for the deliverance of mankind from the wrath which was their natural portion. The theory that the sufferings and the death of the righteous were of a "meritorious" character, and accepted by God as an atonement for the sins of their families or their nation, was a current one in post-exilic Judaism; Paul, therefore, in explaining the undeserved death of the righteous Messiah in this sense, was merely applying and extending on a cosmic scale the scope of an idea which he found ready to hand. Knowing no sin, Jesus was "made sin" on man's behalf, *i.e.*, His sinless suffering was accepted on behalf of man's sinfulness,

and His righteousness was counted to those who had none of their own. Those who by faith appropriated the salvation which had been potentially obtained for all were literally "bought with a price"; the question for Paul, as Pfleiderer observes,[1] was not to *whom* that price was paid, but that it *was* paid, and paid by means of the death of Christ.

Now any doctrinal system having for its presupposition the Fall of man from some original moral perfection —whether in the form of a more or less literal acceptance of the incidents narrated in Gen. iii., or in that of "some moral disaster or calamity" supposed to have fallen upon human nature "at some distant period of our race, perhaps at the very beginning"—is to that extent in conflict with all modern knowledge; it is in direct opposition to all we have been taught by science to believe concerning the real history of the human race, which is the history of a rise from sub-human—not of a fall from superhuman—beginnings. To say, as a recent writer does, that "the doctrine of the Fall is vital to the Christian system," is therefore a most hazardous statement, which stakes the truth of Christianity itself upon a supposed historical fact which is unsupported by any evidence, and rendered more than doubtful by all such scientific evidence as we possess. It is quite true that "the doctrine of the Fall is vital" to the *Pauline* system—the system which requires the total depravity of man as an indispensable point of departure from which to proceed to the

[1] *Paulinismus*, S. 136.

further doctrine of imputed righteousness. Where the historical Fall is once definitely abandoned, a great deal of doctrinal superstructure naturally follows the doctrinal basis. If the death of Jesus had for its object to save us from the results of such a primeval catastrophe, then that object itself is gone so soon as belief in the catastrophe itself is discarded, as discarded it must be. On historical and scientific grounds alone the modern mind refuses to believe that the death on Calvary was designed to make good the mischief done in the garden of Eden.

In making this statement we mean that historical and scientific grounds by themselves are sufficient to discredit the traditional theory. As a matter of fact, however, that theory is even more unacceptable on ethical grounds. Its central idea may be stated in two ways, *viz.*, (i.) that, an offence having been committed, justice requires a victim ; or (ii.) that, a debt having been incurred, it does not matter who pays it, so long as it is paid. From both these notions we unhesitatingly dissent.

(i.) If it is represented that the Divine Righteousness requires that sin should be expiated by suffering, we object at once that any view which regards punishment as retributive falls short of the highest morality, which sanctions punishment only when its infliction aims at the offender's moral amendment. Suffering follows in the wake of sin, not for the purpose of assuaging the wrath of an outraged Deity, but in order to bring about the reform of the sinner ; hence, to absolve him from the consequences entailed by his conduct would be morally

disastrous. But still less is it even conceivable that the Divine Righteousness, supposing it needed to be satisfied in this manner, could be propitiated by a mere *quantum* of suffering, whether borne by the real offender or by another. Of the immoral axiom that justice requires a victim, it has been well observed that, "expressed in plain words, that means that when a murder has been committed, a just judge would give sentence that somebody must be hanged for it, whether he be guilty or not. The inherent sense of justice planted by the Creator in our hearts tells us that it would be better far that a hundred guilty persons should escape punishment rather than that one innocent person should suffer." Moreover, if suffering is viewed as the punishment of sin, and punishment as retributive—which is only another word for vindictive—it is obvious that retribution can only wait upon guilt, and that to "punish" a Sinless Person is simply impossible. The escape usually sought from this dilemma—*viz.*, the unethical character of suffering inflicted upon the innocent instead of the guilty as a means of satisfying *justice*—is that of representing that the sufferings borne by Christ were really inflicted by God upon Himself: that, as Dr. Dale expressed it, "In the death of Christ He to whom it belongs to inflict suffering endures suffering instead of inflicting it;" or, in the words of a more recent writer, that death represents "God Himself bearing sin's tremendous load, in order that He might lift the burden of it off His sinful child, who, if left unaided, must have been crushed by it."

But such a theory is not rendered more acceptable by being called "an unfathomable mystery;" this idea of God satisfying Himself by punishing Himself in order to be able to forgive His creatures for the consequences of their inherited depravity—which, being inherited, could not be of the nature of guilt at all—is in our view as laboured as it is unsubstantial. Or, lest such a criticism of so great a theologian as Dr. Dale should appear to lie open to the charge of presumption, let us quote the acute observation made upon it by Dr. Horton: "Conceding that God is bound by His own nature to punish sins, we cannot see the intrinsic reasonableness of Himself suffering, instead of inflicting, the punishment, or how from self-inflicted pain He derives the power to forgive sins."[1] To our way of thinking, the fundamental error underlying this theory, like that of Anselm, of which it is a modification, is that God's justice needs to be "satisfied" by suffering proportionate to the sin before He can forgive the sinner, from which there is only one step to what has been called "the monstrous idea" that the sufferings of our Lord were equivalent to those due from the whole of sinful mankind.[2]

(ii.) The conception of sin as a debt, which, having

[1] See *Faith and Criticism*, p. 197. "We get no glimmering of reason," Dr. Horton continues, "why He should be obliged to make a suffering of His own the antecedent condition of pardoning its" (*i.e.*, the law's) "violation, or how the suffering endured should have any vital relation with those who had transgressed the law."

[2] "Some Modern Views of the Atonement," by the Rev. J. Hugh

been incurred, may be cancelled by anybody who is willing and able to pay it in lieu of the real debtor, is one which needs only to be stated in plain language in order to be rejected by all whose ethical perceptions are sensitive. It has its roots in that doctrine of later Judaism, already referred to, which taught that the sufferings of the pious, being unmerited, could be put to the credit account of their less highly deserving relatives, or to that of the nation. Pharisaism taught that man, by performing good works, or enduring undeserved trials, acquired corresponding claims upon God, and that any balance over and above what was necessary for his own salvation might be allocated in other directions to make up existing deficiencies. Great as was the vogue of this view, it can only be described as being painfully mechanical and unspiritual. No one who has reflected upon the inalienable character of moral goodness and moral guilt can any longer accept this mercantile theory; and least of all can we look upon merit and demerit as transferable from one account to another, so much righteousness being placed by *A* to the credit of *B*, while *A* takes over *B*'s liabilities. Such transactions are possible in commerce; they are impossible in morals.

So far, then, as the traditional view regards the death of Jesus either as designed to counteract the con-

Beibitz, M.A., in the *Expository Times*, July, 1907. The author adds: "This is, of course, a piece of pure mythology, unwarranted by any scriptural authority. But this theological nightmare represents the culmination of the immoral and irrational theory of retributive punishment."

sequences of the Fall, or as affording satisfaction to God's righteousness for the sins of the world—a vast price paid in settlement of a vast indebtedness—we have no choice but to declare our disbelief in it, holding it as we do to be historically unwarrantable and ethically unsound.

III

But now we must turn to a highly important contention which is put forward by a number of modern thinkers with an emphasis which shows the central and fundamental value they themselves attach to it, *viz.*, that the death of Christ on the Cross is the sole means whereby forgiveness is or can be ministered by God to man. Thus we have been quite recently assured in various quarters that "apart from that"—*i.e.*, the Cross—"men cannot be actually forgiven"; that "in the Cross and resurrection alone stand our forgiveness and our eternal life," and so forth. We propose to examine that view as set forth by one of its most distinguished representatives, the Rev. W. L. Walker, who has carefully stated and defended it in a recent work. Mr. Walker asks himself the question, What did death mean to Christ? and returns the answer, "To the Jew, nurtured on the Old Testament, it was the doom of sin."[1] The author's argument may be summarised as follows: Jesus underwent death; death was the punishment of sin; and since He could not submit to punishment for any sins of His own, He must have borne that due to others. We need

[1] *What about the New Theology?* p. 143.

not once more enlarge upon the unsatisfactory conception of punishment which is implied in such a course of reasoning; what is for the moment of even greater importance for us to note is that the foundation upon which this doctrinal edifice is built is purely imaginary. For it is simply not the case that "to the Jew, nurtured on the Old Testament, death was the doom of sin." Anyone who has been nurtured on the Pauline Epistles might hold such a view, *viz.*, that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin;" but to the Old Testament, and to the normal Jewish consciousness, such a notion is simply foreign. The story of the Fall, on which alone that idea could be based, notoriously found no echo in the Hebrew Scriptures; we shall seek in vain for any suggestion in the remainder of the Old Testament that death is "the doom of sin."[1] For the earliest distinct reference to this doctrine in Jewish literature we must go to an apocryphal work, the "Wisdom of Solomon," which probably was not composed until the first century A.D., and where we read (ch. ii. 24) that "by the envy of the devil death entered into the world." As Mr. Montefiore says, "The idea of original sin and of an historic fall never became a dogma of the synagogue. Judaism was therefore saved from those gloomy and

[1] To say that "the wages of sin is death," is to make quite a different kind of statement, from which it would be the height of illogicality to deduce that death, as such, is the doom of sin. This is as if one were to argue that because oxalic acid, taken in certain doses, leads to death, therefore all deaths must be due to oxalic poisoning.

fatalistic consequences so elaborately worked out in Calvinistic theology."[1] Calamities in *this* life were habitually interpreted as signs of the Divine disfavour upon the transgressor or his descendants; "the reward of the righteous is long life on earth (Prov. iii. 16), the punishment of the wicked is premature death (Prov. x. 27)"[2]; but death itself, while it might be due to sin, was simply conceived as the normal end of life—always referred to in an accent of sadness, but certainly never regarded as a universal doom following upon universal transgression. The assertion, therefore, that Jesus, being a Jew, could view His death only as a punishment for sin, simply falls to the ground, while it derives no atom of support from His own utterances; and, the premiss being faulty, all the conclusions drawn from it are invalidated.

Let us, however, follow this author's line of reasoning a little further. When the object is to show that the Cross is the sole agency whereby the Divine pardon can be bestowed, some strange interpretations have to be put on history. Thus we read: "Jesus had proclaimed the forgiving love of God; yet scarcely any had believed in it—there was something standing between man and God, keeping back the kingdom. It was sin. Man's sin must be acknowledged and removed ere the Divine forgiveness could come to men with saving power. The death that was the doom of sinful men must be set forth in His"—*viz.*, Christ's—"Person, and bowed to

[1] *Religion of the Ancient Hebrews*, p. 514.

[2] Prof. Crawford Toy, *Judaism and Christianity*, p. 404.

by Him in man's name before even men's own consciences would suffer them to believe in Divine forgiveness."[1] That is a truly remarkable statement, and one which suggests more than one pertinent question. One wonders, *e.g.*, what warrant any modern writer can have for the categorical assertion that scarcely anyone had believed in the forgiving love of God when Jesus preached it. Is it suggested that Jesus went at first on mistaken, because unsuccessful, lines in His preaching? Yet, if this is not what is meant, it would be difficult to say what such a statement seeks to convey. Let us follow the chain of argument, link by link: Jesus preached God's forgiveness; but forgiveness could not come—and that was why the Lord's preaching met with scarcely any belief—because man's sin was not yet removed; and the method of removing sin was Christ's death, because in dying He bore the doom, *i.e.*, the punishment, due to sinful man. We confess that we do not follow the logic, nor, above all, the ethics, of this extraordinary transaction.

And so indispensable, we are given to understand, was Christ's death, as the only means of removing man's sin, that the sacrifice had to be consummated "before even men's own consciences would suffer them to believe in Divine forgiveness." We might well ask how, except under the sway of a preconceived theory, devout and learned men can put forward a statement so directly at variance with obvious fact, to say nothing of elementary ethical considerations. Is it contended that no man has

[1] *What about the New Theology?* p. 144.

ever had a sense of Divine forgiveness apart from holding a certain theory of the death of Christ? Has, *e.g.*, no pious Jew ever been blessed with a sense of the Divine pardon? What, then, of the unvarying witness of the Old Testament, in psalm and prophecy? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and He will abundantly pardon." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, Thou wilt not despise." "Thou, O Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee." Why should such testimony be so cavalierly set aside, and fact be accommodated to theory—a theory which tells us that the very offer of forgiveness was not made until barely nineteen hundred years ago, so that men could not believe in it even when it was preached as fact by the Son of God? It is hard to believe that theologians have made adequate use of their imagination when they lay down the proposition that all the multitudes outside the Christian Church are excluded from the feeling that God could so much as forgive them.[1] And those who hold this view are surely betrayed into a curious inconsistency; for they would mostly contend that Jesus Himself had power to forgive

[1] We cannot forbear quoting the following from a sermon by a distinguished Jewish preacher, the late Rev. Simeon Singer "'Let a man wrong his fellow,' say our sages, 'and be eager to make atonement for it. He whom he has offended says to him, "I will not be content with a private apology; before the

men their sins, and He Himself said, "Thy sins are forgiven—go in peace." But according to these theologians men's sins *could* not be forgiven, except through Christ's death, and Calvary lay as yet in the future. It suffices to say that if we conclude that our Lord really meant what He said in pronouncing men forgiven—if we conclude that He meant what His words imply when He stated that the repentant publican went down to his house *justified*—the whole contention which we are examining is shown to be baseless. For that contention really shuts us up to one of the two following alternatives: *either* the Divine pardon could not be obtained at all prior to a certain date in the year 29 A.D., and in that case the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures must be discredited; *or* such pardon could be so obtained prior to that date, but not subsequent to it, except on one condition, and in that case the Cross has not widened, but narrowed, the channels of God's mercy—which would be indeed a strange conclusion.

This interpretation of Christ's death, then, as constituting the one means apart from which men "cannot be actually forgiven," we are bound to reject as at once irrational and unethical; and similarly must we reject the view according to which the object and effect of that

world thou shalt make me reparation."' But a man may have sinned against his God in the sight of the whole world, and he goes into a corner of the sanctuary, and in secret communion with the Most Holy he pours forth all the confession and all the sadness of a contrite spirit, and God forgives him freely and fully." (*Literary Remains*, vol. i., p. 75.)

death were those of "producing in the first instance a change in God's attitude towards the sinner," or that "Christ died to reconcile the Father to us." [1] When the framer of these statements says that the latter phrase, "if not strictly Biblical, conveys the essential ideas of Scripture, which is quite obscured by the statement that His death reconciles men to God," we can only express our disagreement from such a conception either of the nature of God, or of the function of Christ, and make our appeal to our Lord's own teaching of that Fatherhood which needs no propitiation by suffering. As Mr. Beibitz says,[2] with pardonable emphasis—"To believe that 'God is love' is to be incapable of believing Him to be a jealous and angry tyrant whose wrath must be satiated with blood and death, and who is party to an immoral bargain (which the punishment of the innocent for the guilty undoubtedly is), by the terms of which the guilty are let off a justly deserved punishment, because a spotless Victim offers Himself in their place."

## IV

What, then, have we left after discarding the historical Fall, the total depravity of man, imputed sin and imputed righteousness, vicarious punishment, the alleged impossibility of pardon apart from the Cross—the whole hazardous transaction whereby the Sinless One is made

[1] J. G. Simpson, art. "Atonement," in Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i. 136.

[2] *loc. cit.*

sin, while the sinner is "ransomed," has his debts paid out of the Sinless One's infinite balance of righteousness? Is there still any sense left in which Christ can be said to have died for us, or have we not by this time done with the Atonement altogether? We suggest that we have two facts left, two ultimate polarities—Love and Sin; sin, which is the antithesis to love, and love, which is the antidote to sin; sin, which is self-seeking, and ends logically in destruction, and love, which is self-giving, and ends in self-realisation and victory over sin and death. By sin—to make this yet once more perfectly plain—we understand the act of a free person, asserting his individual will against the known will of God. Only a willed act can be sinful—an act which it lay with the individual to do or leave undone—just as only such an act can be righteous, or have any moral complexion at all. If "our wills are ours, we know not how," we know at least that "our wills are ours" in order that we may bring them into harmony with a Will, a purpose, not ourselves, which *is* Righteousness. All speculative theories apart, we know when we are in harmony with that Will by a sense of inner satisfaction, which we lose the moment we rebel against it. There is no blessedness in sin, but rather an acute disharmony, the sense of a chasm of our own creating—not unlike the feeling most men have known after quarrelling with a good friend for the sake of showing their independence or gratifying their pride. But we were not made to live in estrangement from God, in enmity to Him. He

made us unto Himself, and our heart is restless till it finds rest in Him. The chasm has to be bridged over, and we are individually too wayward, too obstinate—for the matter of that, too really foolish and feeble—to do this unaided and unguided; and yet our being cries out to be made one with God again. It is, of course, not to be believed that God at any time disregarded that cry, or withheld such answer and guidance as men were able to hear and to follow, for more than we can yearn for reunion with God does God yearn for us to be reconciled to Him. But in the fulness of time there was given to men, in the Incarnate Son of God, a supreme revelation of God's abounding love, of His unwearying pity, His gracious purpose, His inexhaustible readiness to forgive the repentant sinner. In God's own time, when the soul of man had been prepared to understand and appreciate such an event, His name was revealed as Father, and His inmost being as Love, in the Word made flesh: that Word, having gone forth from Him, could not return to Him void, or fail to accomplish the thing whereto He sent it.

For the sake of clearness we may be allowed in this place briefly to recapitulate what we have already said concerning the redemptive work of Jesus, *viz.*, in so far as men have been, and are intended to be, "saved by His *life*" (Rom. v. 10). When the Son of God was manifested, there arose, first of all, a new consciousness of transgression, of unworthiness, a new and deepened sense of sin, as the result of the revelation of a new standard

of manhood. There is a certain tragic irony in the fact that the Greece which wrote across the portico of its national fane the words "Know thyself" never succeeded in attaining to this self-knowledge. For the truest knowledge of ourselves begins with the discovery that we are sinners, that we lack inner harmony, and have fallen short; and that feeling is quickened in every heart in which Christ is revealed. Obviously, such a discovery is painful; but, as obviously, it is for our truest good that we should make it, for only when we are keenly conscious that all is not well with us can we so much as desire to strive for amendment.

When we behold God's character, then, writ legibly in Christ, we are alike conscious of an ideal, and of the immense distance which separates us from it; but the ideal, being in human form, impresses us as imitable if not attainable—in other words, the example of Christ is itself not merely the most telling rebuke to sin, but the most effective agency in drawing men from sin to God. As sin loosens its deadly grip, the distance between man and God diminishes, and the process of atonement is being begun. The sinner's self-will, which always involves a certain amount of self-deception, is being conquered, and man in reaching out after God finds himself, just as in striving to be his best self he finds God.

And to the sinner who has almost despaired of himself Christ's tenderness brings the barely credible message that God has not despaired of him, thinks him

worth raising up after his hundredth fall, has sent His own dear Son to tend and minister to him. We may go far afield, in foolish wilfulness, but we cannot stray beyond the love of God; we may debase ourselves, and sink low indeed, but we cannot empty the human soul of its infinite value for God. That knowledge, too, comes to man in a new and startling fashion through Christ's compassion upon sinners; he feels that he must somehow be worth saving, or God would not have put forth so much effort to secure that end; above all, he discovers that when he yields to the Saviour's call, and confesses his utter unworthiness to God, pleading no merit or excuse, the experience of heart-broken contrition is also the experience of that immediate free pardon which the language of theology calls justification by faith apart from works. With that experience gained, many hindrances to the Godward life vanish, and the soul braces herself to new endeavours in response to God's grace.[1]

[1] At the risk of over-insistence, we must, however, yet once more urge the necessity of careful distinction between sin considered as an offence against God and as a wrong done by the sinner to his fellows and to himself. It is—and on reflection we shall see that it can be—only under its first aspect that transgressions are capable of being immediately blotted out by God. Obviously, if a man has brought himself to merited shame and want by gambling, no repentance will instantly restore him to the position he has forfeited; if he has ruined his constitution by drunkenness, repentance will not give him back the health he has undermined. God's love will forgive the injury done to Himself; but that love will not at once re-kindle the extinct fires in the

V

But if these spiritual benefits flow from the *life* of Christ, is it true, we repeat once more, that He *died* for us? The answer to that question will in no small measure depend upon the meaning we attach to the word "for"—a more than ambiguous syllable. What does the apostle mean when he speaks of the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us? "There are," we have recently been reminded,[1] "twenty-three different Greek expressions translated by the word 'for' in the New Testament. Now there are two chief meanings, either of which might attach to the word in our text.[2] First, 'who died for us' might mean 'who died a death which otherwise we should have had to die,' as when Sidney Carton died *in place of* Charles Darney. Second, it might mean 'who died on our behalf,' as when Arnold von Winkelried died on behalf of his country. Now in the New Testament there are

sinner's eye, steady his tell-tale gait, or erase the lines graven in his face by evil thoughts and ways. In respect of all these, the penitent is still his embodied past; he has merely put himself in the way of salvation, and will have to work out that salvation by long-continued effort. The same, of course, holds good of sins committed by man against man; these, surely, cannot be instantaneously obliterated by the Righteous Judge, nor would it be well that the wrong-doer should cease to feel remorse for them, while his victims may perhaps still be suffering from the wrong his greed or lawless desires have inflicted upon them.

[1] By Dr. Newton Marshall, *Atonement and Progress*, p. 78.

[2] 1 Thess. v. 9, 10.

two distinct words for these two distinct meanings. In the phrase 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' one of these words is used, the word meaning *in place of;* in the phrase 'Pray for them which despitefully use you,' the other word is used, that which means *on behalf of.* If we are to understand our text, we must know that it is the second of these words that is used here. That is, when Paul says that Jesus died *for* us, he uses the same word as when he writes to the Colossians, 'We pray *for* you.' Paul means, then, that Jesus died on our behalf. This, too, is certainly the sense in which every such reference in the New Testament to the death of Jesus is made, with perhaps one exception." With this fact established, a point of great importance has been gained. In affirming that Jesus died for us, we are not using a form of words which originally had reference to the death of a substituted Victim who took our punishment and so secured our escape, but to something suffered on our behalf—a death which had for its object, not to effect a change in God's attitude towards man, but, as we shall see, to effect a change in man's attitude towards God.

If we would understand how such an end could be brought about by such means, we must note two facts concerning that death—its manner and its motive. We must in the first place realise quite clearly that Christ's death was *voluntary*; it was no mere yielding to the inevitable, no mere submission to fate when struggle would have been useless. In the Fourth Gospel we have

explicit declarations that no man was *taking* the Lord's life from Him—that He had power to lay it down and to take it up again ; we are also expressly told that the soldiers who had come to effect His arrest fell to the ground, seized by a supernatural panic. But there was no need for the introduction of such legendary embellishments, though the intention which prompted them is quite obvious. The voluntariness of Christ's Passion is the same characteristic which pervaded His whole ministry. He did not blunder to the Cross, but walked to it with His eyes wide open, never mistaking His goal ; "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." He decided, fully aware of the risks involved, upon a course of action which, humanly speaking, could lead to only one foregone conclusion, *viz.*, His violent death. His whole message and manner of proclaiming it marked Him out as the objective of the bitter hatred of priests and Pharisees ; and in going to Jerusalem, He well knew—and even the disciples felt it at first—that He was going to probable doom. There seems to have come a decisive point in the Lord's career when He grew convinced that the triumph of His Gospel needed His sacrifice ; and when He had reached that certainty, probably not without inward struggle, He did not hesitate, but offered Himself as the sacrifice required. We say "not without inward struggle," for Jesus was no pale ascetic who turned from life without a regret ; and His was no passionless surrender, for He had seen all the mighty possibilities that lay within His reach. Not

without pain, then, but without demur, He laid down His life, so crowning and completing His life's work; the sacrificial death sealed the sacrificial life, being a complete self-offering made on men's behalf.

In saying this, we have already expressed the motive of His death, an utter, self-emptied, self-giving love. He had taken up His ministry from the same impulse, an overflowing compassion for the multitude, an immense desire to seek and to save, to lead men from self and sin to God. When He saw with growing clearness that only the offering of His life would accomplish that object on the largest scale, the demand did not dismay Him. And in yielding to it unflinchingly, His instinct was unerring; for, as we already said, nothing has so focussed the world's regard upon Him, nothing has so endeared Him to mankind, has raised His Gospel to such power, as His love-prompted death: as the dying Samson slew more than he had slain in all his days, so the dying Jesus became to untold numbers the means of salvation and the Giver of life.

But let us also, in trying to understand that self-offering, take into account the supreme grandeur of the One who made it. Jesus was far too great not to be aware of His greatness; He did not doubt that He was standing in a unique relation to the Father; in surrendering His life, He knew what He was laying down. Possibly an illustration may enable us to realise more clearly something of the character of the sacrifice. In his novel *Beauchamp's Career*, Mr. Meredith draws a character of exceptional talents and charms, young, and with a

great future before him ; and just when life seems to be holding out a friendly hand to him, he meets his death in gallantly rescuing a small boy whom the world—in its own judgment—could most easily have spared. The closing words of the book will not readily be forgotten by those who have read them :

"'My boy!' the woman cried, and dragged the urchin to Lord Romfrey's feet. 'It's the boy Commander Beauchamp drowned to save,' said a man. All the lights of the ring were turned on the head of the boy. . . .

"This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp! It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him."

Now, perhaps, we begin to appreciate what really happened—what is involved in the statement that the Son of God died for sinners. He died to rescue men from their sins. It is positively true that sin slew the Son of God : it required so great a sacrifice to attain the end which He had set before Himself. If we may isolate a popular line from its setting, it is entirely accurate that "there was no other good enough." It was love, the Divine motive, the Divine essence—it was God in Christ, that is to say—that prompted and suffered Calvary ; and only that motive, only that power, was adequate to such a task. This was the highest manifestation of the Divine affection and its redemptive purpose which the world has seen ; so far as Godhead can be revealed to human faculty, we behold it upon the

Cross, appealing to us, and saying—"See what I am suffering to win you: be ye reconciled unto Me."

This fact, the relative position of the Sufferer and those for whom He suffered, should enable us in advance to answer an objection which is sometimes made in the following form: There have been unnumbered thousands of heroic self-offerings in the course of history; what is it that makes this one stand out above all others? What of a Father Damien, who gave his life to minister to lepers, or of some brave miner, who laid down his in an attempt to rescue an entombed comrade? We can imagine the rescuer's memory being cherished with feelings of gratitude for ever after by the one whom he died to save; but would there be more than this? Would the sacrifice be an incentive to purity and righteousness of life, and thus prove an ethical stimulus? In a word, assuming the heroic Christ to have been of the self-same race as the heroic miner, why should the death of the former be singled out as the highest manifestation of the Divine affection and its redemptive purpose, and what is it that gives to it its unique character and power?

While these questions are strictly legitimate, the answers to them are not really far to seek. In the first place, let us quite frankly acknowledge the community of motive which inspired the sacrifice of Calvary and that of the miner-hero; that motive, in both cases, and thousands besides, was self-giving, self-forgetful love; in both cases, and thousands besides, we behold voluntary, vicarious suffering, as distinct from vicarious punishment.

But when we have admitted so much without grudging —indeed, with rejoicing—we have still to ask ourselves whether it is not fair to assume that such deeds as that of the miner, the leper-saint, and many another, owed the stimulus which inspired them to that greater surrender which was made by Jesus Christ. By this we do not for a moment suggest what would, indeed, be capable of direct disproof, *viz.*, that the instinct of self-sacrifice had not existed before it was exemplified in the voluntary death of Christ ; we suggest rather that in Him that instinct attained to unparalleled proportions, so as to become the inspiration of countless self-sacrificing lives throughout the ages. While light is light, whether original or derived, we rightly distinguish between the central and the borrowed radiance, as we distinguish between the source and the thousand rivulets that trace their waters to it. Had there been no supreme instance of consecrated love nineteen centuries ago, is it not certain that the history of those centuries would have been unspeakably poorer in golden deeds and saintly lives?

Moreover, it is surely a mistake to say that the fact of owing one's life to the heroism of another, who had died to save us, would awaken in us *only* sentiments of personal gratitude ; it is at least more probable that a new awe, a new solemnity, would come into our existence when we reflected on the price that had been paid for it—we should feel it a debt of honour to make a better use of what had been so dearly purchased. If we knew that certain opportunities had been brought within our reach

only through the self-abnegations, the privations, willingly endured by someone else—perhaps a parent who had denied himself all manner of comforts so that we might be able to enjoy educational advantages—would not that knowledge react upon our conduct, making us feel that we were not our own? We cannot doubt that such would be the effect.

And now we may, so much being granted, point yet once more from the admitted identity of motive which prompted our Lord's self-sacrifice and many another to the real point of difference. We read, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," the implication being that the man and his friends are equals, as in our case of the miner and those whom he tried to rescue, nobly perishing in the attempt. But what if, instead of their being equals, there were a great and palpable inequality between them? What if the life voluntarily surrendered were one particularly valuable? We have instanced the case of Meredith's hero: we might instance that of the captain of a foundering vessel remaining on the bridge until the last emigrant had been placed in one of the lifeboats, and if necessary going down at his post while the rest were saved; and we have felt a glow of admiration in reading of some officer riding through a hail of bullets to rescue a fallen private. But these are mere differences in rank; how much more impressive grows the sacrifice when the difference is one in character—when it is a holy, pure and exalted life that is surrendered without a murmur

for the sake of lives of an infinitely lower level! Should we not feel conscious, if such a sacrifice had been made for us, of a new and deeper obligation to live aright? And when the life thus ungrudgingly laid down is the best and highest ever lived—the life of the Son of God—must we not, acknowledging the immeasurable difference between the quality of that life and our own, acknowledge a correspondingly greater indebtedness, nay, an indebtedness of a unique kind? We can understand the meaning of the maxim which speaks of "the utmost for the highest"; but here we see the utmost given—Christ crucified—for the commonplace, for ordinary men and women like ourselves, frail, sinful, apparently of little worth. If we will mentally go over the formula "Christ died for sinners" three or four times, emphasising each word in turn, we shall realise successively something of the uniqueness of the Victim, the greatness of the sacrifice, and the motive and object with which it was accomplished. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die—scarcely for a friend will a man lay down his life; but Christ died for sinners.

We ask ourselves, What is the meaning, what is the effect of such a death? We think it is true to say that Christ's voluntary self-offering has been the greatest of all incentives to right living, the greatest encouragement and stimulus to the pursuit of goodness, that has ever come to the race. Since the Incarnate Love was willing to suffer the utmost humiliation and agony for our sakes, it follows that the purpose which was thus sought to be ful-

filled, the reconciliation of man to God, must be unspeakably dear to the Father; and, as a matter of historical fact, that purpose has been achieved in unnumbered souls who have in the Cross discerned God's guarantee of His unquenchable Fatherly affection. Nowhere so intensely as here have men felt the Divine attraction of goodness; and hence no other event can for a moment compare with the death of Christ as the chiefest of all redemptive forces.

And not only has the Lord's self-sacrifice thus reacted in every age upon the individual soul; but in its total effect it has created a whole condition of things in which right living has become far more possible, and hence the sufferings which follow upon breaches of the moral law may be far more easily avoided. And here we perceive in what sense it is accurate to say that, while the Saviour died on behalf of mankind, He also suffered in our stead —not, *i.e.*, as bearing the punishment which we had incurred, but by making it possible for us to live righteously, so as *not* to incur the reward of wrongdoing. Thus it is indeed true that with His stripes we are healed; it is true that "of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace."

To the question, "Did Christ die for us?" we therefore return an unhesitating answer in the affirmative, as we do to the similar question, "Does the Cross save?" The Cross saves, not as though God's wrath were appeased by the sufferings of an innocent Victim, and moved thereby to pardon the guilty, but because it

reveals the sublimity of self-givingness, and exhibits Love enduring to the uttermost for the sake of the beloved. We do not believe that God "refused to forgive before, and consented after, the crucifixion;" we do believe that on Calvary the Divine Love takes a shape so compelling, pleads in a voice so poignant, as to break down the stronghold of sin in the heart which yields itself to the influences that stream from the Cross. By God's own act in Christ the enmity is slain, the middle wall of partition broken down, captivity led captive, and the soul, set free from the bondage of sin, drawn by the magnetism of love, loses and finds herself in God. Such strength—the moral strength to break away from sin and to live a new life—has come to men age after age, in the experience which exclaims, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

"Hereby know we"—or rather, to translate literally, In this have we come to know—"what love is, because He laid down His life for us." Inasmuch as the death of the Cross was due to sin, it makes sin more hateful; inasmuch as it shows forth love at its fullest, it makes Love more loveable; inasmuch as this death was endured for our sakes, it imposes upon us a sacred duty. The greatness of the sacrifice is at once the measure of sin's sinfulness, the guarantee of our hopes, and the reminder of our obligation not to prove wholly unworthy of it. Love died for us—can we do less than live for love? He died to save sinners into goodness, tasting death for every man; and to be turned from evil, to be brought into

harmony with the will of God, conquered by the appeal of our dying Lord—this is the Atonement which is offered to us in Jesus Christ, blessed for ever. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

We bring our inquiry to a close with more than a slight sense of its incomplete and fragmentary character, yet not without all hope that such a treatment of some of the great questions arising in connection with Christ, as we have attempted may render some help in furthering that religious reconstruction which is in such an especial manner the concern of the present age. We reaffirm emphatically that He is indeed the Son of God, the very Image of His Substance, God manifest in the flesh ; that He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin ; we believe that no tale of wonder told concerning Him can do more than shadow forth His true and incomparable grandeur ; that He had power to forgive sins ; that we are saved by belief in Him ; that the grave could not hold Him, but that He manifested Himself to His own again ; and that He set the crown upon His earthly mission by dying for us men. "Greater love hath no man."

Thus all the questionings of our restless age, faced fearlessly, do but serve to set forth the undimmed splendour of the Christ of God, establishing anew, and more firmly than ever, His title to be the Son, the Revealer, the Mediator, the Example, the Saviour—Himself "the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God." His

Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, His revelation is full and final, and of His dominion over the hearts of men there will never be an end. To-day and to-morrow and the day following—but best of all to-day—we may feel His fascination, experience His redeeming power in the unplumbed deeps of the soul, and with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord, come to be transformed into the same image. In the contemplation of His holy life and death, His ministry and Passion, we see the loving purposes of God to us-ward lying open to our vision as never before; in the contemplation of His Cross we behold the mystery of Love made manifest, God reconciling the world unto Himself, and in lowliest gratitude falter away into the words of the ancient hymn—*Tantus labor non sit cassus*, "Let not such labour be in vain."

"*Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the Name which is above every name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

THE END

DATE DUE

DEC 4 19

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

232
W295

Warshaw, Joseph

AUTHOR

Jesus: seven questions.

TITLE

232
W295 Warshaw, Joseph
Jesus: seven questions.

38294